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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship of a self-esteem program to achievement of minority at-risk students. The researcher identified a high-performing urban elementary school (Monte Sano Elementary School) with a primarily low-income, single-parent, black student body. A qualitative research approach was used to collect data, and extensive observations of all aspects of the school's operation and interviews with all levels of school staff were conducted (approximately 75 hours of observation). Data then were analyzed for patterns that would describe the school's self-esteem program. The following five general headings, each comprising many subcategories, were found: (1) direct teaching; (2) discipline; (3) high academic expectations; (4) the personal touch; and (5) teaching values. Each category simultaneously promoted both students' self-esteem and academic achievement, suggesting that the two are closely interrelated in a successful elementary school setting for at-risk students. The significance of this finding in light of the on-going debate among educators and school critics between self-esteem and high academic standards is discussed. The study also offers a theoretical explanation for the findings--the significance of an effective principal who orchestrated and modeled the school's self-esteem/academic achievement program. Finally, the study provides possible applications and recommendations based on the findings. (Contains 68 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Self-Esteem and Achievement: Case Study of Success with Elementary At-Risk Students

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August 1993

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I. Overview

This study explores the relationship of a self-esteem program to achievement of minority at-risk students. The researcher identified a high-performing urban elementary school with a primarily low income, single-parent, Black student body. A qualitative research approach was used to collect data; extensive observations of all aspects of the school's operation and interviews with all levels of the school's staff were conducted. Data then were analyzed for patterns that would describe the school's self-esteem program. Five general headings, each comprising many subcategories, were found--direct teaching, discipline, high academic expectations, the personal touch, and teaching values. All are described in detail and are related to recent educational research. The researcher found that each category simultaneously promoted both students' self-esteem and academic achievement, suggesting that the two are closely interrelated in a successful elementary school setting for at-risk students. The study explains the significance of this finding in light of the on-going debate among educators and school critics between self-esteem and high academic standards. The study also offers a theoretical explanation for the findings--the significance of an effective principal who orchestrated and modeled the school's self-esteem/academic achievement program. Finally, the study provides possible applications of the findings and future recommendations based on the findings.

II. The Research Topic

A. Research Questions

The major research question was: Did Monte Sano Elementary School have a coherent, consistent self-esteem program that appeared related to students' achievement? A corollary of this was: What were the components of the self-esteem program? The researcher determined whether such a program existed and, if so, what its components were in an inductive manner (i.e., through observations of staff-student interactions, supplemented by interviews of staff concerning their actions and intentions).

B. Importance of the Study

Over the past few decades, educators increasingly have accepted the notion that self-esteem is an important educational goal (Gwin, 1990). A major reason for this trend has been the increase in America's at-risk students and the assumption by many educators that "the underachievement displayed by at-risk pupils is strongly associated with or related to their self-assessment and overall self-regard in a causal manner" (Walker, 1991, p. 4). For example, a California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility argued in their Final Report (Akin et al., 1990):

> Teachers and other school personnel have little if any direct influence on most of these factors [e.g., poverty, teen parenting, residential mobility, single-parent families, violence in the home, mental illness]. However, they do have regular, direct contact with the children

themselves. And they control a number of variables that have the potential of inducing growth in even the most intellectually and emotionally malnourished student. For some of these children, school may be the only place where the interpersonal behaviors are modeled. If school is a welcoming place where children feel they belong, where they regularly receive attention, acceptance, approval, and affection and where learning experiences are relative to their needs, there is a chance--perhaps even a good chance--that they'll avoid being labeled "at-risk" and earn instead the label "successful" (p. 8).

Such an emphasis on self-esteem for minority students has had a theoretical basis. As early as 1966, the famed Coleman Report (cited in Powell, 1989) stated that motivational variables accounted for most of the variance in the academic achievement of minority youth, many of whom were labeled "disadvantaged" (the 1960s euphemism for low-achieving, marginal students now labeled "at-risk" [Walker, 1991]). Since then, theorists have continued to attribute much of minorities' low academic achievement to motivational factors. For example, Irvine (1990) cited "lack of cultural synchronization" (p. xvii) between students and teachers and teachers' low expectations as reasons for Black students' "lack of achievement motivation" (p. xxi). Irvine believed that behaviors such as excessive absences, poor schoolwork, and a peer culture that denigrates academic success were manifestations of

this low motivation. McDermott (1987, cited in Hale-Benson, 1989) tersely described this hypothetical process:

> Interethnic code differences cause miscommunication between the teacher and the children. This deteriorates the relations until the children begin to form alternatives to the teacher's organization of the classroom. The children construct this new social organization in an attempt to become visible. The result is more condemnation of their behavior, and the teacher becomes the administrator in charge of failure. . . . School failure becomes an achievement because it is a rational adaptation made by children to human relations in host schools. Children produce pariah-host statuses in their interactions with each other and their teachers (pp. 85-86).

Other theorists cited macro-cultural factors as the source of minority students' lack of motivation. McCarthy (1990), for example, said their low motivation reflected America's "normative value system" (p. 7) which assigns superior and inferior roles to predetermined groups and uses public institutions, such as schools, to articulate them. Covington (1992) identified the competitive nature of schooling as the cause of Black students' low motivation. According to him, these students have had the ability to succeed in school, "but [chose], consciously or unconsciously, to avoid the costs of acting white" (p. 94).

Of course, poor minority achievement has been attributed to factors other than poor motivation, such as tracking (Haycock,

1990, Visions of a better way, 1989) and testing (Betances, 1990, Visions of a better way, 1989). However, a number of researchers, including those mentioned above, have cited motivational factors. As Graham (1989) summarized, they found "far too many minority children perform[ing] poorly in school not because they lack basic intellectual capacities or specific learning skills but because they have low expectations, feel hopeless, lack interest, or give up in the face of potential failure" (p. 40). Thus, a study such as this that focused on a successful minority school's self-esteem program, even though self-esteem might constitute only one aspect of motivation, would appear to be of widespread interest.

This study also might be of interest because it depicted the inner workings of a successful, urban elementary school. Urban schools, where most of America's minority, at-risk students are enrolled, generally have been impervious to educational reform movements of the 1980s (Gill, 1991). As Ascher (1991) observed, these schools have provided a shamefully inadequate education for their students in general. And, most crucial of the urban schools is the elementary school. "The rescue of the at-risk learner begins in elementary school" (Sizemore, 1990 p. 48), as Sizemore so aptly stated.

C. Literature Review

The concept of self-esteem has had a long, and somewhat convoluted, history, particularly as relating to educational achievement of minority and/or "at-risk" students. In the

following section the term first will be defined, and various theories concerning its composition will be delineated. Next, studies depicting a correlation between self-esteem and achievement will be reviewed. Third, research pertaining to the self-esteem-achievement relationship for minority and at-risk students will be discussed. Finally, a summary of current areas of controversy concerning self-esteem will be provided.

1. Definition of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem has been defined as "an attitude, whether of approval or disapproval, that a person holds toward him or herself . . . [and] is conveyed to others, either verbally or by expressive behavior" (Walker, 1991, p. 6). Thus, self-esteem involves value judgments, while self-concept refers more generically to the individual's simple "awareness of his or her own characteristics and attributes and the ways in which he or she is both like and unlike others" (McCandless & Evans, 1973, cited in Spencer, 1988, p. 60). However, the two concepts often have been used interchangeably. As Spencer acknowledged, "self-esteem and self-concept are intimately related. Value judgments about what children learn about themselves are frequently so interwoven that it is unlikely that they themselves separate fact from evaluation" (p. 60).

Self-esteem, like values, morals, and ethics, to which it has been closely related, is learned; it is "personally constructed out of interactions with the environment" (Canfield, 1991, p. 28). According to Spencer (1988), this occurs during

the initial year of life when an individual first differentiates himself or herself from caretakers and other aspects of his or her surroundings. Gradually, the awareness becomes more defined, with individuals rating themselves on various continua, such as quiet-talkative and strong-weak. Schools and the various players within them, thus, would appear to provide important modeling and feedback for such value judgments.

Theories concerning the precise composition of self-esteem have varied (Byrne, 1984, cited in Walker, 1991). First has been the nomothetic viewpoint--that self-esteem is a "unidimensional construct" (Rosenberg, 1965; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1973; Soares & Soares, 1983; all cited in Walker). An alternate view has depicted self-esteem as multifaceted, although specific models have varied. Proponents of a hierarchical model have proposed that a general self-concept subsumes various facets, all of which can be ranked hierarchically (Byrne, 1982; Shavelson & Bolees, 1983; both cited in Walker). Adherents of a taxonomic model, such as Byrne (1984, cited in Walker) have viewed the specific facets as being semiautonomous. Other theorists (Winne & Marx, 1988, cited in Walker) have proposed a compensatory model in which the various facets are inversely related, i.e., a high ranking in one area may offset a low ranking in another area.

Theorists favoring the multifaceted perspective of self-concept have differed not only in the relationship among the various facets. They also have differed in their descriptions of the facets. Several (no citation, in Madhere, 1991) have

believed that self-esteem consists of three primary facets: academic self-esteem, social self-esteem (based on peer acceptance), and personal self-esteem, with one or two secondary facets, such as physical appearance and physical competence (Harter, 1978, cited in Madhere) or family self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967, cited in Madhere). Other theorists (Marsh & MacDonald Holmes, 1990), who studied three widely-used instruments to measure self-esteem (not including the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, however) identified three major facets: physical, social, and academic. They admitted, though, that "these dimensions may not be sufficient . . . to adequately represent self-concept" (p. 111).

Empirical research has supported such multi-faceted descriptions of self-esteem. A factor analysis of 320 self-esteem inventories of Black students in grades five through eight from eight Washington, D.C., public schools (using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory [Madhere, 1991]) identified three primary facets: social self-esteem (group spirit and personal maturity), academic self-esteem (academic pride and student-teacher relationships), and home-related self-esteem (parental closeness and strictness). It also found a secondary facet, intrapersonal self-esteem, consisting of estimates of self-worth and individual resolve on the one hand, and inadequacy and vulnerability on the other hand. A study with at-risk students in Newark, New Jersey (Walker, 1991), also using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, identified similar primary and

secondary facets but replaced the "intrapersonal self-esteem" (Madhere) label with a "general self-concept" label. In addition, this study (Walker) found support for the hierarchical model of self-esteem because general self-esteem correlated rather highly with the specific factors, while correlations among specific factors were quite low. Since correlations among these specific factors decreased with students' grade level, the taxonomic model also appeared valid. (Other researchers also have discovered increasing autonomy among self-esteem facets with age [Cairns and Tidman, 1984; Marsh & O'Neil, 1984; Marsh, Smith, & Barnes, 1983; all cited in Walker]). In addition, the Newark, New Jersey, study (Walker) validated the compensatory model of self-esteem by discovering that students who rated themselves high in the social area rated themselves low in the academic area, especially with an increase in age.

In summary, self-esteem has been found to be a value judgment concerning oneself with a number of subcategories.

2. Relationship of Self-Esteem and Achievement

Researchers have confirmed that self-esteem and achievement are, indeed, correlated. As Byrne (1984, cited in Beame, 1991) pointed out, "the correlation is relatively weak when global self-esteem is involved but strong when self-esteem is situation specific, as in the case, for example, of self-esteem in mathematics, reading, physical education, or some other area" (p. 25). The Newark, New Jersey, study (Walker, 1991) with at-risk students similarly found that increases in students' general

self-esteem as the result of an intensive counseling program promoted neither higher standardized test scores nor higher classroom grades. In fact, the correlation between general self-esteem and achievement levels for the control group, which did not experience counseling and its self-esteem benefits, exceeded that of the experimental group.

While academic self-esteem and achievement appear most highly correlated, many researchers have noted a positive, albeit low, correlation between general self-esteem and achievement (Baecher, Cleehelli, & Baratta, 1989; Bouslow, 1965; Fink, 1965; Purkey, 1970; Hansford & Hattie, 1982; Zirkel & Moses, 1971, all cited in Walker, 1991). (Note, however, that two studies [Powell, 1985, and Jordan, 1981, both cited in Powell, 1989] found no relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement.)

Correlation does not constitute causation, and opinions have differed concerning the nature of the self-esteem-achievement relationship. A longitudinal study (Bridgeman & Shipman, 1978, cited in Walker, 1991) of 404 children from disadvantaged backgrounds suggested that academic achievement promoted various self-esteem ratings, rather than the other way around. A 1977 study (Calsyn & Kenny, cited in Walker) of high school students discovered the same direction of causality. As Covington (1992) movingly observed:

> In our society human value is measured largely in terms of one's ability to achieve competitively. . . . Researchers have found that nothing contributes more to a student's sense of esteem than good grades, nor shatters it so completely as do poor grades. It is achievement, then--and its handmaiden, ability--that dominates as the ultimate value in the minds of many school children. Given this reality, it is not surprising that the student's sense of esteem often becomes equated with ability (p. 16).

Other researchers similarly have testified to the harmful effects on self-esteem of low achievement and failure (Ames, 1978; Gibby & Gibby, 1967; Hayes & Prinz, 1976, Kifer, 1975, and Purkey, 1970; all cited in Walker, 1991).

However, researchers also have found that increases in self-esteem appear to promote achievement. Reasoner (1992) reported several studies to this effect. He first cited correlational studies by Covington (no date) that led him to conclude that improvements in self-esteem can result in higher achievement. Reasoner also cited the case of Parlier Unified School District, a California district consisting almost entirely of low SES, Hispanic students. It attained higher than expected achievement levels, as well as a marked decrease in discipline referrals, after implementation of a Building Self-Esteem Program in its middle schools (no citation). Results were even more pronounced in the Moreland (California) Elementary School District, a district of average SES and a 35-40% minority population. After

five years' experience with the Building Self-Esteem Program plus some additional materials, Moreland performed highest of all districts in Santa Clara County, with all grade levels achieving an average of 94 percentile or above in basic skills (Moreland Recognition Program, 1984; Reasoner, 1992).

In reviewing this research, Reasoner (1992) observed that self-esteem consists of more than "feeling good or confidence building" (p. 24). He listed six areas as influencing self-esteem: inherited characteristics such as physique and intelligence, moral virtues, acceptance by others, self-respect, self-control, and achievement. Inclusion of the latter, explained as "one's skills, possessions and successes" (p. 24), may, indeed, eliminate apparent contradictions between research cited by Reasoner (1992) and that previously cited, which contended that achievement promotes self-esteem. However, other researchers, Mayer (1980, cited in Walker, 1991) and Pugh (1976, cited in Walker, 1991), concurred with Reasoner's stated thesis that self-esteem promotes academic achievement.

In summary, achievement and self-esteem, especially academic self-esteem, appear related, although opinions have differed on the exact nature of the relationship.

3. Self-Esteem-Achievement Relationship for Minority and At-Risk Students

Now that self-esteem has been defined and its relationship(s) with achievement have been explored, research concerning minority and at-risk students' self-esteem,

particularly as it relates to achievement, will be reviewed. As a preliminary step, one must note what might well be a popular misconception in the literature--i.e., that Blacks lack self-esteem. As Spencer (1988) explained, "For the most part, the traditional oft-cited self-concept theorists who described Black self-concept were usually concerned with children's racial attitudes or reference group orientation" (p. 62). Theorists (no citations, in Spencer) interpreted findings of Black preschoolers' preference for white dolls, for example, as rejection of their own ethnicity and, thus, rejection of themselves. According to several scholars (Spencer, 1976, cited in Spencer, 1988; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990), however, such preferences merely reflect a white bias that permeates the American culture. (Interestingly, Black students of lower socioeconomic status are more positively disposed toward their ethnicity than Black students of middle or high socioeconomic status [Powell, 1989].)

Related research (no citation, in Covington, 1992) describing Blacks' belief in an external locus of control, i.e., that their fate was in the hands of others, also connoted low self-esteem to some theorists (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, cited in Covington). For example, a claim was made that the:

> tendency among blacks to discount themselves as agents of their own achievement is thought to occur in part because white America has long held low academic expectations for Blacks and because Blacks, as a result, have come to doubt

their intellectual potential (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, cited in Covington, p. 62).

Yet this belief in an external locus of control may, again, simply reflect Blacks' recognition of the social reality of racism rather than low ratings of themselves.

In actual fact, recent research has shown that Blacks generally have high self-esteem. As several researchers (Eagle et al., 1988; Rosenberg, 1965; Spencer, 1988; all cited in Madhere, 1991) have noted, the self-esteem of Black children equaled or exceeded that of white children at comparable ages. The Newark, New Jersey, study (Walker, 1991) with at-risk students similarly found positive self-esteem ratings (both before and after the experimental intervention), although those for Black students were slightly lower and had greater variability than those for bilingual students. The study also noted a general rise in self-esteem from third to eighth grades. Madhere (1991), in contrasting such findings with previously noted Black students' preference for white cultural artifacts and an external locus of control, theorized that:

> appraisal of one's own capabilities [can be separated from] one's judgments of the odds for success in prospective situations. . . . Because young African Americans are able to maintain a relatively high level of self-esteem, they must be making a distinction between their beliefs about themselves and their judgments about social situations and outcomes (p. 49).

One study (Hare, 1987, cited in Hale-Benson, 1989) noted that findings of Black students' high self-esteem were confined to general self-esteem and home self-esteem. Academic self-esteem was lower, according to this study, which logically was matched by significantly lower than average reading and mathematics standardized test results. However, several other studies (Hare, 1985, cited in Covington, 1992; Stevenson, 1990, 1992) found high academic self-esteem among Black and Hispanic at-risk children. They rated themselves highly both on indices of perceived ability and perceived academic achievement.

Stevenson's (1990, 1992) study of first, third, and fifth graders in twenty Chicago ghetto schools was especially illuminating. Fully three-fourths of the first graders expected to be among the best students in their class the following year, and 58% of the fifth graders considered themselves as "above average" or "among the best students" in intelligence, schoolwork, and achievement. Even mothers of these students, unlike mothers of comparable white Chicago school children, rated their children highly. A full 30% considered their children "much above average," the highest possible ranking, on the three attributes of intelligence, creativity, and memory. Such perceptions were at odds with reality.

Thus, not only is the general self-esteem-achievement correlation significantly lower for minority students than for white students (Madhere, 1991; Hansford & Hattie, 1982; cited in Walker, 1991), but the academic self-esteem-achievement

relationship also appears lower (Stevenson, 1990). The Newark, New Jersey, study (Walker, 1991) with at-risk students similarly found no correlation between students' academic self-concept and standardized test results even before the experimental intervention.

The Newark, New Jersey, study (Walker, 1991) did discover a correlation between the academic self-concept and students' in-class performance (before the experimental intervention, i.e., in normal classroom conditions). This suggests that teachers were sending students false messages about their achievement. Stevenson (1990, 1992) concluded similarly in analyzing the results of his study with Chicago ghetto school children. In his opinion the academic self-esteem-achievement gap among these students resulted from inaccurate feedback and tracking, both of which deluded students about acceptable standards. The low norms typical of many ghetto schools may, in fact, have constituted a form of institutional tracking (Stevenson, 1990).

Whatever the causes of the academic self-esteem-achievement mismatch for minority at-risk students, the results would seem to be even more devastating. In the words of Stevenson (1992):

> We deceive our children when we concentrate on making them feel good regardless of their level of accomplishment. The truth is they face a bleak future if they are unable to compete with their peers, both in the United States and in other industrialized nations (p. 25).

He, instead, proposed setting challenging goals and conveying accurate feedback that would "provide students with a sense of competence that [would] help them develop a healthy, realistic basis for feeling good about themselves" (p. 30).

4. Current Areas of Controversy concerning Self-Esteem

As is apparent in the preceding section, self-esteem has become a controversial topic in education. As an ASCD Update article (Willis, 1990) recently queried: "Must schools boost students' self-esteem before learning can take place? Or does self-esteem come through the student's ability to meet high academic expectations?" (p. 6). A 1992 issue of School Administrator featured a debate between the two sides. Both proponents (Reasoner, 1992; Stevenson, 1992) actually incorporated the other's position: the advocate of self-esteem pointed out the necessity of maintaining high academic standards while the advocate of academic achievement recognized the need for children to feel confident and self-assured. Nevertheless, their tones were strikingly different. Reasoner, the self-esteem proponent, claimed: "It is evident that a focus on self-esteem provides the atmosphere and conditions for innovation, restructuring, and effective instruction that make a difference in behavior and achievement" (p. 30). Stevenson, the academic standards spokesperson, argued that "self-esteem [should] be based upon achievements guided by standards comparable to those found in other industrialized countries" (p. 30). Educators who would promote self-esteem through multiculturalism have been

similarly derided for "seeking to short-circuit the democratic ideal of education instead of offering disadvantaged children an education that would promote social mobility" (Hymowitz, 1992, p. 29). Magazines and professional journals, such as Time (Krauthammer, 1990) and Educational Leadership (Beame, 1991) also have thrown down the gauntlet.

Behind this rash of rhetoric, however, has laid a serious issue. In the words of Gwin (1990):

> Most teachers are beginning to concern themselves with the self-worth of the children as well as the child's achievement. But is self-esteem building really a great idea? Are teachers using precious teaching time to make a child feel good about himself only to see this same child perform poorly on national exams? (p. 16)

III. Research Method

A. General Approach

1. Ex Post Facto Research

The general approach taken in the study mimicked that of Ronald Edmonds' (no citation, in Brandt, 1987) foundation work on effective schools. That is, a school with high achievement, Monte Sano Elementary School, first was located. The researcher then gathered data pertinent to the research questions in an effort to see whether components of a self-esteem program appeared to correlate with the high achievement. In using this approach, the researcher hoped to reveal actual education practices that have succeeded. As urban education expert Asa Hilliard recently observed, "Most things that go on in education have no empirical foundation behind them at all" (Willis, 1993, p. 3). He recommended instead that educators learn from proven successes.

2. Qualitative Methodology

Since one would anticipate that self-esteem would be promoted primarily through the implicit curriculum, the researcher used a qualitative research approach. As defined by Taylor and Bogdan (1984), qualitative research is characterized by an inductive approach; a holistic view of social reality; a naturalistic and unobtrusive manner of working with people; an attempt to understand people from their own frame of reference; a suspension of one's own predispositions; an appreciation for all perspectives and settings; a humanistic view of social life; a

profound concern for the validity of research findings; a flexible, craftlike stance toward conduct of a study; and a phenomenological perspective in which human behavior is perceived as a product of people's definitions of their world. Thus, in observing and interviewing school participants, the researcher attempted to:

--record as many discrete interactions of and statements by participants as possible;

--perceive interactions and intentions from the perspectives of participants;

--be flexible and open concerning the types of participant interactions and interpretations that were recorded;

--seek out different settings of the school in regard to persons, time, and place;

--realize the interrelationships among different interactions in regard to persons, time, and place;

--assume a humble, mild-mannered, and friendly approach in relating to the various participants;

--respect participants' overriding concern with their work, and

--check and recheck notes for accuracy and completeness.

Specifically, the study was an ethnography. That is, it was a "richly textured description of community life that allows [the reader] to understand others on their own terms" (Brodkey, 1987, cited in Finders, 1992, p. 60). As is true of most ethnographies (Merriam, 1985), the study attempted to use culture as an

organizing tool. In searching for interactions and intentions related to self-esteem, the study, in effect, was exploring the total way of life among Monte Sano Elementary School students and staff.

B. Study Design

1. Pilot Study

To the best knowledge of the researcher, there have been no previous studies attempting to describe a school's self-esteem program inductively, that is, from the perspective of the school's actual interactions and intentions. This project, of necessity, was a pilot study. Lacking pre-ordinate categories from previous research, the researcher felt especially compelled to collect as wide-ranging data as possible.

2. Unit of Analysis and Generalization

The unit of analysis was one: Monte Sano Elementary School. As such, it is a case study that was purposefully selected. As explained previously, Monte Sano has been a generally high-performing urban school with a student body consisting primarily of minority, at-risk students. It was hoped that, in addition to shedding light on the current controversy between self-esteem and/or high achievement standards in schools, an analysis of Monte Sano's self-esteem program (if any) would be of interest to other similar schools. Only educators at such schools would be able to determine whether their situation might be sufficiently similar to that of Monte Sano to permit such generalization. As renowned researcher Mary M. Kennedy (1979) explained, educational

generalization resembles legal and clinical generalizations in being based on analogous situations.

3. Description of the Site Studied

In the words of a college student who was assigned to Monte Sano for her field experience, the school seemed "like something out of an old movie." Indeed, a comforting quaintness and strength pervaded the school. The main building is squarish, two-story, red brick, with a well-kept lawn and neatly-trimmed bushes and flowers in front. It is old, having been dedicated in 1925, to which a leaky roof and antiquated plumbing occasionally testify. However, the school's maintenance man repairs what he can, and the school appears to be in generally good condition. The school also is large, with 18 regular classrooms; four small classrooms or tutoring centers; a large auditorium; an extensive, sunlit cafeteria; a small but architecturally pleasing library; and several additional rooms. To one side of the main building are a playground and field for physical education. In the back are four small, permanent structures that currently house Special Education, Chapter I Reading, Chapter I Mathematics, and music classes.

As one enters the main doorway, a sign standing at the junction of the short entrance hallway and main hallway reads: "Welcome to Monte Sano. Please Stop by the Office before Visiting." The office is to the right, a small, neat room adorned with plants and oil paintings done by the school secretary. The waiting area has sofas and chairs as well as a

fish tank. The principal's office, with its door customarily open, is just a few feet away through a small, swinging gate. At least one of the two secretaries is on hand at all times to answer the telephone, greet visitors, oversee students waiting for the principal, and handle emergencies.

Across the hallway from the office is Monte Sano's teachers' lounge. It, too, is attractively decorated with sofas, chairs, tables, plants (albeit plastic), and a Coke machine. Several copying machines, one recently purchased as the result of a $10,000 donation by an alumnus, also are present. Teachers, teaching assistants, school secretaries, and occasional visiting college students make good use of the room.

Monte Sano's hallways feature street signs that relate to its mascot, the bumblebee. On the first floor "Buzz Boulevard" intersects with "Green Hornet Drive," and on the second floor "Stinger Street" and "Hornet's Nest Way" converge. The wooden floors gleam, while runners of industrial carpet are meticulously swept daily. Hallway walls feature students' original work, such as essays and pictures, and colorful, informative teacher-made bulletin boards. At two points, where the hallways are a bit enlarged, groupings of sofas, chairs, tables, and plants make inviting nooks. A bright quilt, also made by the secretary, and several stuffed animals adorn the sofa of the more centrally-located nook.

Classrooms similarly exude a sense of order and warmth. Walls are painted a combination of off-white or gray and a

brilliant color, such as yellow or blue. Students' desks are divided into two or three sections so that teachers can walk among students as they work. Shelves, cabinets, and file drawers store a wealth of materials. Again, student work is featured on classroom walls. Teachers also mount displays concerning classroom rules, student progress, content being studied, learning strategies, and so on. As in the rest of the school, neither litter nor graffiti is visible. However, the dirty film on classroom baseboards as well as smudges and marks on the walls testify to the humanness and activity of classroom occupants.

Monte Sano fronts a pleasant neighborhood of old and generally large homes. Some have been fashionably restored, while others seem more dilapidated. Few of the children from this neighborhood appear to attend Monte Sano. Rather, nearly all students are bused from lower-class neighborhoods nearby. Some hail from an area behind a large hospital complex, located just behind the school on one of the city's major arterials. Others come from a neighborhood off this arterial toward the city's center. Both areas consist of very small homes, duplexes, and apartments. Although none of Monte Sano's students are "housing project children," they primarily consist of minority, urban poor.

Seven years ago Monte Sano Elementary School was designated by the Georgia State Department of Education as an Innovative Demonstration School of Excellence. This meant that the school received funding from the state and local levels ($87,000 from

the former and $10,000 from the latter), primarily for the purpose of training teachers in proven teaching strategies. A team of educators from University of Georgia implemented Madeline Hunter's Effective Teaching model. First, however, a needs assessment was done at Monte Sano to assure the program's relevance to the local setting. Also, Mrs. Bertha Sutton was designated principal and was given the authority to hire 11 new teachers beyond the seven that she inherited. Although pressure during that first year was intense, with many teachers "threaten[ing] to leave," according to Mrs. Sutton, attitudes changed when "they saw the test scores and felt like they owned [the program]." Monte Sano topped the district, whereas it had ranked among the lowest performing schools in previous years.

Since that first year, generally high achievement levels have continued, with Monte Sano's students usually exceeding local and state norms. The only teachers who have left have done so because of family relocation or retirement. In the words of many, Monte Sano's staff is "one big, happy family." One might add that it also is a successful "family."

4. Triangulation

Data and methodological triangulation were used by the researcher to increase the validity of the findings. As explained by Denzin (1978, cited in Patton, 1986), "No single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival causal factors. Because each method reveals different aspects of

empirical reality, multiple methods of observations must be employed" (p. 109).

Data triangulation consisted of interviews with several local college students who had been placed at Monte Sano for their field experience or student teaching and with area educators who had contact with the school. Students shared their general impressions of teacher-student relations and teacher intentions. One of the educators was a principal herself of a highly successful city high school. She and the researcher compared her approach with students to that used by Monte Sano's principal. Another educator who was interviewed served as an assistant professor at a local college and had coordinated both field-experience students and student teachers at Monte Sano. She was able to share her impressions of general teaching approaches and interaction styles of the school's teachers. Third, a content- area curriculum supervisor employed by the county school system was interviewed. She regularly conducted Monte Sano classes on community field trips and had observed teachers' behavior management practices.

Methodological triangulation consisted of perusing school documents. One, A Booklet for Parents, (Yeomans, no date) contained the following sections: "Reading Ideas for Your Child," "Math for Your Child," "Behavior Management Techniques," and "Study Tips for Your Child." A booklet, Self-Concept Building (Coar, no date) provided suggested activities for students' emotional, spiritual, and physical needs at various

grade levels. Two booklets, both titled Improving Writing Skills, had been developed by Monte Sano's writing lab teacher, who actually was a teaching assistant, and the school's former assistant principal for in-service teacher training.

Many other materials also were provided to the researcher: daily teacher schedules; student handouts at special drug and hygiene/maturation programs; county forms used in determining special education placements; several agendas and their supplementary materials (one was for a two-day faculty staff development program, another for a one-day teaching assistants' coordinator meeting, and a third for a school faculty meeting); Positive Action Publishing letters and order forms, and a PTA program and Treasurer's Report.

The researcher also studied handouts for teachers in which specific teaching strategies employed by Monte Sano were described. The most important of these was a teacher evaluation checklist consisting of six items related to effective school research; nine items pertaining to an Individualized Language Arts (ILA) program; four items concerning a Thinkabout video series; five items related to a Systematic Teaching and Measuring Mathematics (STAMM) program; two items pertaining to a Communications Activities Skills Project (CASP); six items concerning an Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction (ECRI) program, and five items related to a Pathways to Emotion Peace (PEP) program. Other teacher handouts included a supplementary document concerning all of the above programs: one document

detailing ECRI, and two documents, a Resource Book and Working Outline, for PEP.

In addition to both data and methodological triangulation, the researcher used two methods to collect data: observation and interviewing, which will be discussed in upcoming sections III.D.1. and III.D.2. She therefore felt assured that she had captured different aspects of Monte Sano Elementary School's reality.

C. Role of the Researcher

1. Neutrality

A basic concern with all research is its objectivity. Qualitative studies, relying as they do on the active involvement of the researcher in collection and comprehension of the data, have been charged with being overly subjective. Yet, as Guba (1978, cited in Patton, 1986) explained, "There seems to be no intrinsic reason why the methods of a properly trained naturalistic inquirer should be anymore doubtful a source of such data than the methods of an investigator using a more quantitative approach" (p. 337). He, therefore, proposed that a concern for neutrality, which would ensure reliable, factual, and confirmable data, replace that of subjectivity.

The researcher did regard herself as neutral, i.e., "not predisposed toward certain findings on an a priori basis" (Patton, 1986, p. 337). Although hailing from a family and ethnic background that emphasized high academic standards, she had come to recognize the importance of idiosyncratic interests

and predilections. In fact, as an educator she had worked successfully with people who were not traditional academic achievers: Black, low-class youth of the metropolitan Pittsburgh and Chicago areas; agrarian Hmong (northern Laos) immigrants to western Washington; wealthy, elite Hispanic youth in South America; poor, rural dwellers of southern Vermont, and the ubiquitous "middle" performing students of all ages, regions, and backgrounds. In each of these cases she had learned to respect, and even treasure, individuals' and groups' unique characteristics and diverse strengths. Thus, her motivation in pursuing the Monte Sano Elementary School research project was not a pre-existing inclination toward either challenging academic standards or building self-esteem. Rather, her motivation was a long-standing interest in multicultural education--i.e., the promotion of achievement among students of diverse cultures, in this case that of American minority at-risk urban students.

The fact that the researcher pursued this study entirely on her own initiative and under her own direction also freed her from possible biases of others. Monte Sano's principal similarly promoted an open mind. She repeatedly stressed the need for both positive and negative feedback. "Be objective . . . it's the only way we grow," she said as the researcher was leaving Monte Sano to begin her analysis of data.

Another hedge against bias is competence "demonstrated by building a 'track record' of fairness and responsibility" (Patton, 1986, p. 378). In several projects conducted as part of

her doctoral studies, findings did differ from initial expectations. For example, a study of curricular decision-making by Indochinese students at an American high school revealed the overriding significance of a caring, domineering faculty rather than the hypothesized Indochinese grapevine. The reality revealed in such studies was interesting and challenging, calling forth the researcher's creative powers. Both public school officials and university professors praised the researcher's methodology and analyses.

Thus, in the Monte Sano Elementary School study, the researcher intended to collect, analyze, and interpret data in an intellectually honest and insightful manner. Due to a lack of personal experience at the elementary level and a dearth of research concerning components of actual, successful self-esteem programs, she did not venture to hypothesize concerning her research results. Rather, she operated purely inductively with the goal of reflecting reality. However, as Pelto and Pelto (1978, cited in Patton, 1986) observed, "We can never establish any final, absolute truth" (p. 272). The findings would simply represent the best attempt of one researcher to understand an educational setting at a given time and place.

2. Problem Areas

While neutrality of the researcher was important to the study's findings, so, too, were others' perceptions of her. The major difficulty was teachers' fears that she was evaluating them. It was handled in several ways.

First, the researcher was very open in telling teachers that she was, in fact, conducting a research project. Initially, she was given a tour of the school and introduced to teachers by the principal as "a professor from Augusta College who's going to be observing us." When several teachers later probed for the exact nature of such observations, she answered that she was attempting to determine "the reasons for Monte Sano's general success with students." This response had the advantage of being both honest and positive, thus promoting rapport between the researcher and teachers. At the same time, it was sufficiently vague to conceal the specific topics under investigation. None of the teachers knew that the researcher was focusing on interactions and intentions related to self-esteem. Nor was the term "self-esteem" ever used in interviews. Therefore, their actions and statements concerning this topic probably were not any more abnormal than other aspects of their behavior in the presence of a stranger. (See sections III.A.2. above and sections III.D.1. and III.D.2. below for additional discussions of the latter issue.)

Another way in which the researcher attempted to overcome teachers' fears of evaluation was to distance herself from the principal. Although offered, she did not use the principal's class rosters indicating high and low performing students when visiting classrooms. She also rarely spoke with the principal after her initial visit. On arriving at the school, she would notify the secretary of her presence and proceed to particular

areas of the school at her own discretion. Such freedom, of course, testified to the principal's overriding concern for a valid study. At the end of the data collection period, the researcher did conduct a culminating interview with the principal.

Third, the researcher tried to appear non-professorial. Knowing that non-verbal communication would be more powerful than verbal communication, she dressed casually, usually in pants and sweaters and occasionally in skirts and sweaters. Only twice, toward the end of the study, did she wear a jacket. She also attempted to relate to all staff members in human terms, talking or occasionally joking about a wide assortment of topics. The staff responded in kind with the exception of some Black teachers who appeared aloof (in marked contrast to Black teaching assistants). Their reticence may have been due to the researcher's race (White) as well as her position. However, by the last fourth of the data collection period, they, too, had warmed up to her and were freely sharing their insights and rationales. In fact, by the end of the data collection period, people at all levels of the school told the researcher they would miss her because she had "become one of the family."

This phenomenon, however, generated an additional problem for the researcher: over-identification with the school. The researcher had found the Monte Sano staff enjoyable and refreshing as human beings. She was also impressed by their dedication, skill, and industry as educators. At times their

efforts even brought tears to her eyes, perhaps in part because she rarely witnessed such successes in urban high schools where she customarily worked with college students.

This problem of over-identification was handled in two ways. First, the researcher deliberately debriefed with a colleague who was not as enamored with Monte Sano's educational programs. This professor believed them to lack creativity and higher thinking skills and prodded the researcher to re-evaluate her data. Second, the researcher did a wide review of the effective schools literature. Since this appeared to be the school's primary teaching strategy, she searched the literature for documented weaknesses and applied them to her data. Several conclusions were, in fact, shared with the principal at the culminating interview. Interestingly, Mrs. Sutton appeared to have no idea of the researcher's general thrill with what she had observed at Monte Sano. In fact, the principal voiced a concern that the researcher might, on occasion, have left the school "disgusted with [the faculty]." The researcher assured her that, if her expression had appeared serious, it was due to fatigue and anything but disgust.

D. Observation and Interviewing Techniques

1. Observation Techniques

The researcher definitely was an onlooker rather than a participant. However, she was able to control the extent to which her presence altered teacher and student behaviors to a great extent by appearing in classrooms and other settings

unannounced. The principal had given her a master schedule of the school's operation, and she used this to randomly determine her visitations. Teachers had a daily schedule with lesson plans that had received prior approval from Mrs. Sutton. Thus, they were not able to deviate greatly from ongoing routines and plans when the researcher appeared. Nearly all eighteen kindergarten through fifth grade teachers were observed from the classroom for an hour of teaching time. In addition, many were surreptitiously observed from hallways.

Another factor controlling for observer intrusion was the fact that Monte Sano, as one of Georgia's Innovative Demonstration Schools of Excellence, frequently had visitors. Neither teachers nor students were greatly surprised to have an education professor in their midst. Only in one case, a classroom with relatively loose discipline, did several girls become giddy in response to the researcher's presence. In all other cases teachers and students were polite; and in most cases students appeared either mildly friendly or oblivious. Interestingly, no teachers complained to the principal about the researcher's presence.

There were only two exceptions to the randomized observation format. In the first week of observations, the researcher happened to visit three teachers who were conducting tests. In fact, testing was a common occurrence at Monte Sano because students' performances were closely monitored. The first two teachers were observed testing students, as this was important

data for the study. However, in the third case the researcher opted for another setting.

The second exception occurred in the final week of data collection. The principal directed the researcher to seven half-hour lessons featuring the ILA, Thinkabout, ECRI, and STAMM programs, mentioned in section III.B.4. above. These observations were treated by the researcher as purely supplementary, since she was all too aware that teachers had been alerted to her attendance.

In addition to grade-level classes, many other aspects of Monte Sano school life were observed. They included: the three "learning labs" (writing, computers, and reading); music classes, physical education classes, the library, a drug awareness presentation, a hygiene and maturation presentation for fourth- and fifth-grade girls, a field trip, a PTA meeting, a faculty meeting, a special education staffing, a student support team meeting, a teaching assistants meeting, and a student birthday party. Since any school's culture is communicated in informal as well as formal settings, the researcher also observed interactions in the cafeteria, teachers' lounge, office, and halls. In each case the researcher attempted to be a natural part of the scene, such as eating in the cafeteria and relaxing in the teachers' lounge.

In all these situations, as explained earlier, the researcher attempted to perceive as much as possible. The only sensitized concept she used was that of classroom management. It

seemed logical that teachers' discipline practices would influence students' self-esteem. Other than that, observations depended on the setting and participants. They included non-verbal communication as well as verbal, and omissions, such as the aforementioned absence of litter.

2. Interviewing Techniques

The researcher did not employ informants, preferring instead to gather information herself. Most interviews were conducted with the informal conversational method. Staff members interviewed in this manner included teachers, the librarian, teaching assistants, custodians, and cafeteria workers. However, some staff members appeared so crucial to the success of Monte Sano that they were more formally interviewed with predetermined guides. These included: the principal, the Chapter I reading teacher, the Chapter I math teacher, a first grade teacher who was selected by the county school district as last year's "teacher of the year," the special education teacher, a veteran first grade teacher, a relatively new fifth grade teacher, a third grade teacher renowned for her writing and science lessons, the writing lab teaching assistant, and the school secretary. The researcher also conducted more formal interviews with several staff members who would be able to compare Monte Sano's operation with that of other schools with similar student populations: the police officer who presented a county-wide drug program to fifth graders; the school nurse, who was assigned to several schools; and two new teachers, one at the second grade level and the other

at fourth grade, who had transferred to Monte Sano together from another county school.

In all cases, ethnographic interviewing rules of thumb were observed. The researcher attempted to keep questions to a minimum and to use the language of the interviewee. She included prefactory statements, empathizing statements, feedback, and reinforcement to build rapport. Questions were open-ended, with only one stated at a time. Initial questions dealt with concrete matters while subsequent questions became more abstract and general. Heeding Van Maanen's (1979) warning "that people lie about things that matter most to them" (p. 544), the researcher probed repeatedly concerning sensitive subjects, such as students' responsiveness to teachers of different races, albeit in different terms.

3. Recording the Data

The researcher spent nearly 75 hours observing and interviewing at Monte Sano. She thus accumulated a wealth of data. Highest priority was given to staff and student verbiage. Statements gleaned during observations and interviews were recorded verbatim by the researcher using a personalized shorthand system. In previous research studies, the researcher had developed the ability to record while mentally perceiving new information. Thus, quotations secured were substantial.

In addition, other information was recorded concerning interactions, participants' feelings, the setting, routines, etc. Many times data was expanded from recall to provide a greater

data base. The researcher's insights also were juxtaposed with data, although within parentheses, to aid in data analysis.

E. Data Analysis

Data gleaned from observations, interviews, and triangulation were separated into 48 different categories. Categories were non-discrete; they represented many different perspectives of the same reality, with much of the data being placed in more than one category. The researcher generated these categories inductively, i.e., allowing them to "emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1986, p. 306). With the exception of "classroom management," the researcher had avoided use of any sensitized concepts even at the observation and interviewing stages of the study (see section III.D.1. above). Thus, mental flexibility in analyzing the data was easily attained. The researcher simply looked for "recurring regularities" (Guba, 1978, cited in Patton, p. 311) in the data to yield categories.

The categories then were reviewed to develop "second order concepts" (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 540) that were more general and inclusive. The resulting five headings of Monte Sano's self-esteem program--direct teaching, discipline, high academic expectations, the personal touch, and teaching values--thus comprised the more specific categories. (Note that eleven categories appeared unrelated and were not included in any headings.) The headings were characterized both by "internal homogeneity" and "external heterogeneity" (Guba, 1978, cited in

Patton, 1986, p. 311), although interrelated. Together they provided a theory that explains and predicts a given domain (Pelto & Pelto, 1978), i.e., a self-esteem program for at-risk elementary students.

Lastly, the researcher considered the plausibility of rival explanations for the general theory. Using the method of "ramification extinction" (Campbell, p. 7), she examined each explanation's implications on the total data for fit. One explanation matched most of the data, with two other explanations partially fitting.

IV. Research Findings

A. Overview

The overwhelming finding was that Monte Sano Elementary School, indeed, had an effective self-esteem program. Many elements, all of which were interrelated, comprised this program. Each will be discussed thoroughly in the upcoming section. Interestingly, some of the program components consisted of or were related to high academic expectations. That is, Monte Sano's generally high standards appeared to promote self-esteem. Other components emphasized students' positive attributes and/or promoted "good feelings" about themselves and the school. Thus, the debate raging among educators (highlighted in Section II.C.), between "feel good" pedagogic approaches versus high academic standards, particularly in relation to the achievement of minority at-risk students, would seem to be ill-conceived. Monte Sano Elementary School suggests that the two are interdependent, perhaps even existing in a symbiotic relationship.

This finding might also explain the confusing research results concerning the relationship between achievement and self-esteem referred to earlier (see Section II.C.). Some studies had identified achievement as the cause of high self-esteem; others had found that high self-esteem promoted achievement, while still others merely had noted a generally positive correlation between the two (particularly academic self-esteem and achievement). If the two are as closely interrelated as research findings at

Monte Sano Elementary suggested, they would both correlate and promote one another.

Indeed, another study (Pravat, 1985, cited in Porter & Brophy, 1988) suggested just this. It had found that elementary teachers who stressed both academic achievement and socialization goals were more likely to attain both goals than were teachers who stressed socialization over achievement. Thus, there has been prior evidence that a positive social climate and academics are interdependent.

In addition to discovering that Monte Sano had an effective self-esteem program and identifying its components, the study explained reasons for its success. Primary among these was the school principal, Mrs. Bertha Sutton. Her role, as well as other factors responsible for the program's success, will be discussed in Section C. below.

B. Elements of Monte Sano's Self-Esteem Program

1. Direct Teaching

All teachers, including teachers at each grade level and teachers of special programs, actively involved students in the learning process. Students were neither dependent on texts for guidance and explanations nor given worksheets to complete on their own. Rather, teachers constantly interacted with students, both in terms of explaining new material and practicing it with them.

This direct teaching appeared to have two results. First, it promoted achievement: Students constantly were called upon

and/or monitored. Although many made mistakes, their mistakes were corrected. Very few appeared inattentive. Second, direct teaching promoted feelings of belonging in an important endeavor, i.e., the learning process. Lessons generally were approached seriously with all students expected to participate. Some were obviously more successful than others, but teachers' insistence on universal participation communicated that all were key players in a significant enterprise.

a. Involvement of students. Involvement of students during explanations was commonplace. In a kindergarten class boys experimented with various configurations of Tinker toys as the teacher encouraged different possibilities. In a first grade learning center, a teacher used question cards to prompt students' interaction with a globe. A second grade teacher had students chant "Trade!" as she explained a crucial step in subtraction. Third grade students formed sets of manipulatives on their desktops to learn multiplication while the teacher guided them from the overhead projector. A fourth grade teacher used students' comments about President Clinton's inaugural address to guide a discussion concerning his themes. A fifth grade teacher asked class members to provide three students entering an oratorical contest with feedback. A third grade Chapter I reading student pointed to words displayed in front of the class as the teacher explained phonics rules. The reading lab teaching assistant had students write about one of their "special days" in preparation for upcoming state writing tests.

Third grade students in the library were allowed to "ooh" and "ahh" to the story of a confused dinosaur. The music teacher encouraged students to "do your thing" during a dance motif. In explaining maturation and hygiene to fourth and fifth grade girls, the school nurse incorporated their questions and comments concerning menstruation.

Monte Sano teachers followed such explanations with practice sessions that again directly involved students. A kindergarten teacher had students dictate sentences about bears utilizing new vocabulary words. A first grade teacher called on students to carefully recite definitions of snow, hail, snow flurries, and snow storms. When several second graders mistakenly answered a particular workbook question, the teacher provided the answer and related it to previously given correct answers. Third grade students reviewed for a science test with a one-on-one, give the correct answer game led by the teacher. Fourth grade students defined new vocabulary words using contextual clues in sentences provided by their teacher. A fifth grade teacher conducted a detailed question-answer review of America's colonies. The Chapter I math teacher had students underline "key words" indicating whether addition or subtraction was called for in various word problems. Students in the computer lab completed a tic-tac-toe drill and practice science program related to classroom work. The violin teacher stood with students as they and she played different notes comprising a chord.

b. Teacher monitoring. A crucial aspect of such practice sessions, whether oral or written, was teachers' careful, constant monitoring. A kindergarten teacher responded to a little girl's missed question by having another student reread the selection on which it was based and re-asking the question. When the girl then answered it correctly, the teacher responded, "See, you have to concentrate. That's what I mean. Good job." First grade students completing a page in their phonics workbook were instructed to "turn [their] 'c' around" or, when writing a 'b' to "be sure [they] don't write a 'd'" by their teacher as she walked up and down aisles. A third grade teacher appraising students' comprehension of a lesson on the dictionary commented, "I'm very pleased as I walk around." She also praised a student who had been corrected for misbehaving several times during the lesson, "Jimmy, good job!" When physical education classes were forced inside due to inclement weather, the teacher circulated around the room checking on students' small-group activities.

Monitoring even occurred when teachers were conducting tests. A second grade teacher noticed that a boy had circled two answers for one question. At the end of the testing period, she directed him to "go back . . . and make sure you have it right." A third grade teacher encouraged some of her students who were befuddled by a section of a test:

> I'll read it to you. I can't say more. For some it will be easy, for some harder. Concentrate. We've seen it in English . . . it's nothing you haven't seen. Bring it up.

Think about it. . . . Think about how they use it with words.

c. Positive approach. This monitoring was positively phrased the vast majority of the time. When a second grade boy repeatedly made errors on a math problem, the teacher gently chided: "Remember, we're subtracting, not adding." A fourth grade teacher concerned about students' unwillingness to write a creative paragraph about snow to accompany previously made pictures said, "This is your paragraph, boys and girls. Do you all have the same pictures? So you can have different paragraphs and pictures." Following a rather lengthy instruction-practice session, a fifth grade teacher checked with four specific students to make sure that they had understood the material.

Even annoying matters such as students' forgetting to put their names on papers were handled positively. The Chapter I math teacher held up a paper with no name and said, "Who are you? Whose good work is this?" A third grade teacher confronting the same problem admonished a student: "This is the last time I don't want to see your name at the top of the paper."

d. Teacher hints. The customary response of Monte Sano teachers to a student's error was to probe and give clues so that the student could re-answer the question correctly. A kindergarten teacher who was told by a student that front teeth are used for chewing and grinding simulated chewing and grinding with exaggerated motions and queried: "You do?" A first grade teacher paused with a student who was unable to explain "what 20

means" to point first at the 2 and then at the 0 until the student finally gave the correct response. When a boy sitting in a corner of a third grade classroom was unable to answer a question, the teacher rephrased it, got the correct response, and added, "Stay with us."

If the teachers did switch to other students after receiving an incorrect response, they almost invariably returned to the original student for reinforcement. For example, a fifth grade teacher leading a discussion on the three branches of government received an untimely observation from a boy. She returned to him several minutes later, after the matter under consideration had been clarified, with "Keith had a great point."

e. Universal participation. Most teachers attempted to attain universal participation as they explained and practiced material with students. Two, a kindergarten and a first grade teacher, used name cards to facilitate this process. Others attempted to do so by simply calling on a variety of students. Most succeeded. Only five of the twenty classroom teachers showed some favoritism, with only two doing so markedly.

Most teachers promoted universal participation through exhortations. For example, a second grade teacher said, "I see some hands going up over here. Is anyone else paying attention?" Another second grade teacher urged, "Someone besides Berinka. She's the only one awake this morning. She must have smelled coffee." A fifth grade teacher took an even stronger approach:

"Come on. Someone else . . . Come on, we're reviewing . . . Come on, you should know this."

f. Summary. Monte Sano teachers' use of direct teaching appeared to promote positive self-esteem, both by ensuring that students learned the material and by involving most students in the learning process. The constant monitoring of students contributed greatly to this process. Positive statements, probes and clues, and a tendency to remain with a student until a correct response was received characterized the monitoring.

The finding that direct teaching promoted positive self-esteem, both through achievement and feelings of belonging, was anticipated in research literature. Covington (1992) explained how achievement and good feelings are interrelated, particularly in the early and mid-elementary years:

> For the young child, effort, ability, and outcome are basically indistinguishable and . . . if anything, trying hard actually increases ability. Thus, a work-ethic mentality allows these children to enjoy a double bonus. By working hard--and, in the bargain, being diligent and well-behaved--they appear not only able, but virtuous as well (p. 83).

A method of teaching that promotes the work-ethic more than direct teaching would be difficult to imagine. Other researchers have pinpointed "active teaching" (Schumann, 1990) or "direct instruction" (Knapp, Turnbull and Shields, 1990); "cue enhancement" (Sizemore, 1990); sequencing, pacing, monitoring,

and providing feedback (Emmer, Evertson, & Anderson, 1980; Evertson & Emmer, 1982; both cited in Evertson & Harris, 1992); and involvement of students (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992, cited in Hirsch, 1993) as positively correlated with achievement, particularly achievement of at-risk minority students.

Monte Sano teachers were trained in direct teaching when the school became an Innovative Demonstration School of Excellence seven years ago. One teacher, recalling the experience, referred to it as a "busy time, a hard time," but admitted that "we all benefitted from that . . . [and the practices] stay with you." Other teachers concurred, citing direct teaching as "good teaching practices." The original training has been reinforced by the school principal, who has distributed an outline, "Effective Teaching for Higher Achievement," to teachers. It has been used as the basis for evaluations of teachers' classroom strategies three times per year.

It should be noted, however, that not all Monte Sano teachers appeared to excel at direct teaching. One teacher executed its techniques, but in a mechanical, tedious manner that seemed to leave students feeling cold. Another teacher's slow pace and lack of dynamism bored students despite the requisite student involvement. A third teacher was plagued both by a slow pace and discipline problems to such an extent that little direct teaching occurred. A fourth teacher's disorganization and errors resulted in few attentive students.

Yet, the vast majority of Monte Sano teachers appeared to be both skilled and motivated direct teachers, many of them extremely so. Perhaps they were familiar with the research findings, such as those cited above, that related direct teaching to high achievement. And, perhaps they intuitively recognized direct teaching's social benefits--the feelings of belonging that it promotes.

2. Discipline

In comparing her field experience at Monte Sano Elementary School with that at other school sites, a college student observed:

> [Monte Sano has an] old-fashioned sort of discipline where problems are dealt with quickly. The teachers are strict, but you can tell they really care about the children. . . . The children know . . . the consequences of an infraction and know the consequences will be carried out.

Indeed, it appeared that Monte Sano's "strict" discipline enabled students both to perform well academically and to feel good about themselves. Rather than indicating harshness or rejection, the discipline seemed to create a positive environment that resulted in high achievement and social cohesion, much as direct teaching did.

a. Incentives. Fundamental to Monte Sano's disciplinary system was, in the words of the principal, each teacher's "incentive program." Classroom rules were prominently posted in each room. Those posted in a third-grade class were typical:

1. We will be polite and courteous.
2. We will pay attention.
3. We won't talk when others are talking.
4. We won't push and shove.
5. We will always do our best.
6. We will complete all assignments.
7. We will raise our hands to speak.

Classroom charts featuring students' names were used to record their adherence, or lack thereof, to such rules. For example, smiling faces, chocolate chips, or progression in a race would indicate "good citizenship," which would be rewarded over time with computer lab time, candy, and/or high conduct grades. Typically, a class with a generally positive chart at week's end was rewarded with a Friday party of popcorn and soda. On the other hand, students whose names were put on the board would receive frowning faces, no chocolate chips, or would not progress in a race. Typically, they were ineligible for the Friday afternoon party and might even incur additional penalties, such as being seated in a corner, having parents contacted, or being sent to the principal. The system, however, was basically a positive one, emphasizing both personal and group rewards for good behavior.

The principal occasionally supplemented teachers' incentive programs with her own. For example, the week prior to Valentine's Day, students throughout the school were showing signs of restlessness. This also was a period of unrelenting

rain, when physical education classes and most recesses were forced indoors. Mrs. Sutton filled a large red heart with chocolate candy and went from room to room, telling children to help themselves if their names were not on the board. As she walked up and down rows, students either said, "Yes, please," or "No, thank you."

Several years ago, the principal developed a similar incentive program to manage end-of-the-year fidgetiness. It was so successful that it became a Monte Sano tradition. In April each student is given five tickets, each one of which can be used for admission to a special program scheduled during April and May: a magic show, honors day, field day, spring fling, and the fifth grade graduation, which also includes "graduation" ceremonies from the drug awareness program and a YMCA-sponsored tutorial program. However, tickets are taken away from students for serious infractions such as fighting or "saying something cruel," in the principal's words. The effect, once, again, has been to encourage students to abide by school rules.

b. Teacher reinforcements. Incentive programs were complemented by a number of other positive strategies. First, teachers constantly recognized and reinforced good behavior of both individual students and classes. A kindergarten teacher whose aide was absent managed three groups of diverse activities primarily by complimenting students, such as "Thank you, Josh, for being so patient." The Chapter I math teacher remarked to a formerly unruly student, "I like the way you came in happy and

smiling today. That was much, much better than yesterday." The writing lab teaching assistant told a class who were writing Valentine letters for veterans, "I appreciate your doing such a good job. . . . Thank you for working so hard." Students who had not quite finished their letters or pictures volunteered to remain after class to complete them.

Many times such reinforcement was directed toward students' work. A first grade teacher noted, "I like the way [student's name] is working on his journal" and later told students to "pat yourself on the back if you're working quietly on your journals." A fourth grade teacher pronounced a student's recitation in front of the class as "very good" and led the class in applauding him. A fifth grade teacher exalted, "Less than an hour ago we heard about time lines, and you all did an excellent job with them." Significantly, such work was dependent upon students' good behavior. Teachers' reinforcement thus fused high achievement and discipline in the minds of the students.

c. Positive approach. Teachers handled behavior problems that did or might materialize in a positive manner. Rather than emphasize students' infractions, teachers highlighted behavior to which they should aspire. A kindergarten teacher alerted students to the end of center activities with, "Hey, I've got bad news for you. Time to clean up." When first grade students began to stare distractedly into space during a phonics lesson, the teacher gently reminded them, "You need to pay attention." A fourth grade teacher commented to a girl re-entering the room

whose clutter was blocking an aisle, "You need to go there and get all that junk off the floor." The physical education teacher began a class confined to the auditorium with "I expect your best behavior."

The most noticeable of these positive reprimands was the seemingly ubiquitous "Excuse me." The Chapter I reading teacher exemplified it when she smilingly interrupted several students: "Excuse me. I will not talk while you're talking. So listen." Of course, there were variations. A fourth grade teacher asked students, "Can you do something for me?" When students responded, "Be quiet" in unison, she replied, "That's right. Let's concentrate." The writing lab teaching assistant shook her finger at a talkative student while saying, "I beg your pardon." Teachers were of one mind in requiring quiet and in phrasing this requirement positively.

d. Use of endearments. Teachers also frequently used endearments when reprimanding students. The endearments often were physical as when a kindergarten teacher fondled the chin of a little boy who had approached her as she said, "See, I can't talk to you because you got out of your seat." More frequently, the endearments were verbal. For example, a first grade teaching assistant asked a boy who was crawling on the floor, "What are you looking for, sweetie?" and then directed him back to a learning center. Many teachers referred to their students as "sir" and "ma'am."

e. Routines. Classroom routines, too, were positive and greatly contributed to a climate that made both achievement and group cohesion possible. All classes required students to line up at the door orderly and quietly and to proceed to other classes, the bathrooms, drinking fountain, or cafeteria in similar fashion. Due to Monte Sano's extensive use of labs, plus physical education, music, and library classes, students filing through hallways was a common occurrence. Yet they rarely, if ever, disturbed classes despite customarily open doors.

Another routine shared by all teachers was quick intervention in common classroom disturbances, such as pencil sharpening, crumpling paper, or student arguments. Almost invariably, teachers sharpened pencils for students, all the while continuing their teaching and monitoring of students' work. The "I can't find my pencil" problem was similarly resolved by teachers giving students one of their own. If a student crumpled paper, which was rare, the teacher herself placed it in the wastepaper can. Student arguments, whether concerning a stolen doll in kindergarten, a shared book in first grade, or missing papers in third grade usually were resolved by the teacher talking in low tones to the involved parties. Such arguments detracted less than ten seconds from class activities as a rule.

In fact, nearly all of Monte Sano teachers' routines emphasized efficiency. For example, while first graders were awaiting buses with coats on and heads down on their desks, the teacher placed coins on the overheard and reviewed once more each

coin's value. All classes began the day with students responding to a question in their journals. Thus, attendance, breakfast counts, and similar procedures were handled while students worked. Most teachers rarely lost a teaching moment.

An additional classroom routine was teachers' insistence on good posture. Students were regularly exhorted to "sit up tall" or "sit up straight." Many times teachers also directed them to "put [their] feet in front of [them]" or "put [their] feet under the table." Again, this served as a positive way of promoting students' good feelings about themselves and a proper approach to school work.

Teachers also had individualized management techniques. For some it was students' placement of their pencils at the top of their desks during teacher explanations. For others it was keeping books closed or off desks entirely while teachers spoke. For still others it was silence and "thumbs up" when student interactions threatened to become disruptive. A few teachers used the daily schedule as a guide for student behaviors as in: "It's 11:25, your next subject. Put your social studies aside."

f. Support by the principal. Despite the use of incentives, reinforcements, a positive approach, endearments, and routines by school staff, serious discipline problems occasionally occurred at Monte Sano. They typically involved physical contact, dishonesty, and verbal abuse. Offending students were conducted directly to the principal, who meted out the punishment: lecture, removal of privileges, spanking, or

suspension. All staff members relied on this backing, from cafeteria workers to bus drivers to teaching assistants and teachers. As one teacher summarized when giving reasons for Monte Sano's success: "[The principal] works very hard to keep up the discipline."

g. Exceptions. The significance of these firm and positively-oriented discipline policies was seen best with an itinerant teacher who tried very different approaches. Rather than use an incentive program, she started classes off with an "A+" and lowered their grades with infractions. Rather than using established routines, she either varied her methods or provided no guidance concerning acceptable procedures. Rather than recognize and reinforce students' good behavior, she emphasized their misdeeds. "Come on, folks, you're wasting my time. I can wait, but the clock can't. Whatever we don't get done, we can never make up," was an oft-repeated remark. This negativism even became personal, as when she exploded, "Boy, we've not been taught any manners!" to a class or, when referring to a class member, she stated, "Some day he will want to get a job, and he won't be able to. He's played his life away." Both classes and individuals became more recalcitrant. Time on task shrank dramatically. In at least one case, students she had verbally abused returned to their classroom, where they normally were well-behaved, only to create discipline problems for their regular teacher. She finally took them to the principal's

office, ignorant of what had caused their sudden change of behavior.

In addition to this itinerant teacher, a classroom teacher was plagued with discipline problems. She did attempt to use positive exhortations, such as, "We have more pride in ourselves than that," or "I really like it when people raise their hands." She also appeared to utilize routines, such as requiring students to walk single file through the halls. However, most classroom rules were not enforced. With a bit of persistence, students were able to interrupt the teacher and one another. They also were able to derail lessons, at times even mocking the teacher's leadership. She then retaliated by bellowing "Excuse me" so loud, it could be heard in neighboring classrooms or upbraiding students with statements such as, "I'm not your mama, and I don't have to take that." The result was noticeably less time on task than other classrooms and a palpably heavy ambiance. As with the itinerant teacher, this exception to prevailing Monte Sano discipline procedures seemed to confirm the significance of constant, firm adherence to the rules in promoting academic achievement and good feelings.

h. Negative impact. While Monte Sano Elementary School's discipline practices generally succeeded in fostering both good feelings and achievement, they appeared to hinder high level thinking and creativity in all areas except writing. Classroom rules and routines encouraged teacher domination and student recitation. Analysis, synthesis, and evaluation exercises were

rare. For example, only one teacher was observed promoting high level thinking in the social studies, as when she asked students to imagine what life would be like without Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone. Also, very few science lessons were observed, even during scheduled science periods, and none featured independent or innovative thinking.

Monte Sano's emphasis on direct teaching, discussed earlier in section IV.B.1., also may have contributed to this lack of higher level thinking. Knapp, Turnbull and Shields (1990) noted, "There is growing dissatisfaction . . . about the ability of direct instruction to convey more integrated and challenging curriculums to students" (p. 6). Cooper (1990) elaborated: "to develop cognitive processes . . . students should be actively engaged in a mixture of interaction and teacher-directed instruction" (p. 177). Indeed, a number of studies (Duffy et al, 1986; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Raphael & Kirschner, 1985; all cited in Porter & Brophy, 1988) have found that instruction in self-monitoring and independent learning activities is crucial for high achievement. Kirkland-Holmes and Federlein (1990) stressed that minority students especially benefit from "activities [that] are open-ended, atypical and do not require one single response" (p. 2).

Monte Sano teachers at all levels did excel in promoting independent and creative writing skills (to be discussed in upcoming Section IV.B.3.g.). However, the principal admitted that she herself often found the social studies lessons boring.

She quickly added that she intended to rectify this shortcoming and asked the researcher for suggestions. Efforts toward more hands-on science, which would promote high level thinking, were already beginning. A teacher introduced kits of science materials at a faculty meeting with the rationale that "the more [students] make predictions, the more they'll develop critical thinking skills in reading and other areas." A workshop on innovative science teaching strategies also was planned. Thus, Monte Sano Elementary School appeared to be aspiring for the "right balance between teacher direction and student responsibility so that students understand what they are doing (and why) and that, over time, their capacity for self-regulated learning increases" (Knapp, Turnbull & Shields, 1990, p. 6).

i. Summary. In summary, Monte Sano was characterized by positively-oriented, firm discipline practices that appeared to promote both achievement and good feelings. The research literature has confirmed this finding. As Porter and Brophy (1988) observed:

> The sheer complexity of the teaching task and of the milieu in which it is conducted--typical classrooms--makes it necessary for all teachers to rely on procedures, routines, implicit discipline rules, and other simplification strategies that make the task manageable (p. 74).

The principal of a local successful high school similarly observed, "First you must have a learning environment." Other researchers, such as Purkey and Smith (1983, cited in Ginsburg &

Hanson, 1990), have identified "an orderly and disciplined school environment" (p. 27) as especially important for at-risk minority students. Wager (1992/1993) elaborated that "strong incentives combined with strong disincentives" (p. 37) particularly enhanced the performance of such students.

At the same time Monte Sano's discipline practices, in combination with direct teaching practices, seemed to squelch high-level thinking in all academic areas except writing.

3. High Academic Expectations

An important contributor to Monte Sano students' high self-esteem appeared to be the school's high academic expectations. As with direct teaching and discipline practices, these expectations fostered good feelings and achievement.

a. Public address announcements. High academic expectations were impressed upon students through the school-wide address system. The principal customarily began the day with announcements that featured a "Question for the Day." The questions were amazingly diverse: Some stressed geography ("What are the largest cities in Georgia in order of size?"); some asked about famous Americans ("Who is the inventor who invented special reading materials for the blind?"); some referred to current events ("We have a new president . . . [and] we have five living Presidents; what are the names of the five living Presidents?"); still others were mind-benders ("A principal is to a school as a mayor is to a what?"). Each day appropriate reference books were displayed in the library so that students stopping there during

recess could research answers. Winners were announced at the day's end and received a book and Dairy Queen coupon.

The principal also exhorted students to "work hard today; learn a lot" during morning announcements. Occasionally, additional advice was forthcoming. In the afternoon announcements before a student holiday, she urged, "Try not to watch too much television. I know you'll watch some television. But try to do your reading." Significantly, the public address system never interrupted class work; it was only used to promote achievement and cohesion at the beginning and end of the school day.

b. Teacher exhortations. Teachers similarly encouraged students. After explaining an assignment, the writing lab teaching assistant added, "I want to see that pencil smokin'." Following several student errors, a third grade teacher admitted, "I was trying to trick you. Be careful. Concentrate." The violin teacher spurred on students in a beginning class with, "All right, we have to catch up to the other class, so let's go." A fourth grade teacher admonished her class: "That's a second grade question that took fourth graders a long time. . . . Come on."

Even casual encounters were used to communicate high expectations. A student who happened to see a teacher he knew in a hallway was asked, "How are you doing?" When he responded that he was earning high grades, she added, "Doesn't surprise me. You're a smart boy."

c. Visual displays. Teachers also communicated their high academic expectations via hall and classroom displays. Despite the rarity of sub-freezing temperatures in Augusta, Georgia, many hall displays in January depicted a winter wonderland of snow, snowmen, and penguins. Student essays on the topic also were displayed. Teachers obviously wanted children to be knowledgeable about cold weather despite its local irrelevance. Black history displays during February were similarly mind-enhancing, featuring a diverse array of Black leaders and related student writing.

d. Modeling. Perhaps teachers' most powerful method of communicating high academic expectations, however, was modeling. Teachers differed widely in their attire, from the most casual sweater-pants-tennies outfits to tailored, three-piece suits and heels. Regardless of attire, teachers were alike in their intense demeanors and strong, clear voices. In this they were joined by the principal, whose serious, deliberate manner connoted even more than her impeccable dress. When the nurse, referring to the principal at the hygiene and maturation presentation, declared, "When Mrs. Sutton comes to your class, you know this is a lady who means business," students spontaneously agreed, "Yes," in awed tones. Similar impressions concerning teachers seemed to prevail. Students were almost invariably courteous and respectful, both in verbiage and actions.

Modeling may have been especially powerful at Monte Sano because the principal and 40% of the teachers were Black. Furthermore, one-third of the teaching aides and one custodian were white. Thus, the 75% of the student body that was Black had no stereotyped, lower-echelon models but, rather, a diversity of positions to which to aspire. The principal attested to this: "They [young, Black girls] tell me they're all going to be lady principals."

In addition to personal examples, Monte Sano attempted to promote modeling through a multicultural curriculum. The principal explained this perspective during a faculty meeting in February, Black History Month. "Students need role models . . . Share things all during the year . . . The more they can see models of themselves, the better." Although the librarian personally did not believe that most students enjoyed Black History Month, she did order and make available to teachers a wide assortment of books and sources on the topic. Teachers also used sources provided by the school system, brought in by individual students, and ordered or prepared by themselves. Multiculturalism also was emphasized through the public address system. One of the "Questions for the Day" during February was: "Name the famous Black tennis star who died this weekend." Another day concluded with two students reading "I Have a Dream" essays.

Thus, whether personal, verbal, or curricular, modeling stressed high aspirations for students of all backgrounds.

e. Recognition. Another powerful means of fostering high academic standards was recognizing students' achievements. Teachers did this visually with displays of students' work in classrooms and school hallways.

Many times displays were accompanied by substantial fanfare, as when a kindergarten teacher exclaimed that pictures of hot food "were so good . . . [she could] even taste them" and suggested inviting the principal to come view them. A third grade teacher added feathers to students' peacocks on display every time they passed a times test. The writing lab teaching aide found that producing actual books similarly reinforced students; they took great pride in having their books on display for other classes to read and enjoy.

A few teachers even made displays concerning students in their classes. For example, a first grade teacher featured a "V.I.P." each week who had been selected by classmates. After noting information about siblings, likes, and dislikes, the teacher concluded, for example, "Jessica is a wonderful girl and a smart student."

Verbal recognition by teachers, of course, also occurred. The librarian responded to a boy who was excelling on science software in the computer lab: "Are you making A's in science? You made me believe you are!" The Chapter I reading teacher announced to an incoming class: "I want to share your test results with you!" Students then proudly announced their score to fellow students, with the teacher commenting that an 89 "is

the highest B you can have" or that a 100 is an "A plus." "Good" and "good job" were verbal reinforcers used by other teachers. They occasionally embellished these more moderate accolades with stickers and prizes.

The principal also went to great lengths to recognize achieving students. At the end of each grading period, she conducted a "ribbon ceremony," rewarding students in every classroom who had attained high marks, good conduct, and perfect attendance with brightly-colored ribbons. Once a father contacted her, pleading that she distribute more ribbons because one of his daughters was distraught over a single lollipop that she had received compared to the many ribbons that his other daughter had been given. Mrs. Sutton responded by explaining to him what the daughter had to do to get a ribbon, which he dutifully noted. Ribbons, thus, were earned. The principal also had names of all honor roll students prominently displayed in the school's first floor hallway.

f. Competitions and tests. Formal competitions were another means of promoting high academic expectations. The annual science fair was taken so seriously that steps had to be implemented to control parents' and siblings' assistance. Fanfare similarly accompanied the county-wide spelling bee, a locally-sponsored speech contest, a statewide creative writing contest, and a county honor band competition.

State tests given in the spring, however, were the ultimate competitions. To monitor students' progress, the principal

tracked all students' test scores in three academic areas: reading, math, and social studies throughout the year. When a student scored below 70, she visited the classroom and conferred with the teacher to determine the source of the difficulty.

Teachers also worked hard to prepare classes for state exams. Students were tested frequently with questions similar to those of the state exams. Teachers at each grade level analyzed test results and cooperatively developed instructional strategies for perceived weaknesses.

Perhaps the test most emphasized was the state writing exam administered to third and fifth graders. Classroom teachers and the writing lab teaching assistant drilled students on the mechanics of writing and encouraged rich, elaborate content. They also tried to address students' fears. "It's nothing more than you've been doing . . . nothing new," they would say. The principal even arranged for fifth graders' essays to be graded by English students at a nearby high school as an additional motivator. Students at other grade levels were told they might someday have a test, too, and "We're getting you ready, just in case." Significantly, in 1992 only two Monte Sano students failed the writing exam--a special education student and a transfer student.

g. Language arts program. This emphasis on the state writing exam was one example of a heavily-tilted language arts curriculum. In a myriad of ways, students were encouraged to excel in reading and writing. Since language is the basis of

most content disciplines, high achievement there logically would promote high achievement in other areas. Thus, it, too, comprised Monte Sano's self-esteem program.

Students in all classes began each day by writing in their "journals." At the second grade level, this might mean responding to "What would you do with a million dollars?" or expounding on "My Nickname." At the fifth grade level, students might "Describe what it would be like to be your parents" or answer, "If you could change Monte Sano for the better, what would you do?" Regardless of level or topic, each journal entry was approached diligently by students and "as a teaching tool" by faculty in the words of a first grade teacher.

A great part of the regular school day also was devoted to language arts. Class schedules might call for health or math, but reading often was substituted. As a first grade teacher explained to her class after a field trip, reading was a "must" so that the class would not lose ground.

In addition, teachers were required to have at least one writing assignment per week. Many of these assignments called for creative expression, as a third grade assignment to "imagine you blew a bubble so big that you floated away" after being encouraged to blow big bubbles with teacher-provided bubble gum. All teachers instructed students in the "Five Stage Writing Process."

Furthermore, Monte Sano participated in a "Book-It Program" that required students to read four books per month from October

through February. Students checked out books from the library during their weekly visit or used books from home. Teachers carefully monitored that books, indeed, had been read and disallowed any "drawing books." Pizza Hut treated winners to a party in April.

Closely related to the "Book-It Program" was Monte Sano's annual celebration of reading held during American Education Week in November. During two afternoons each class presented a "living book report," a synopsis or section from a favorite book plus action, to other classes. For example, one class dressed in red, white, and blue hats reported on a book concerning the American flag by having various members step forward to share highlights. The week also featured community adults and older students reading special books to individual classes. Among 1992 participants were a television weatherman and the police department chief of detectives.

Monte Sano's librarian also promoted the use of books. In addition to Book-It Program check-outs, she frequently supplied classes with books and materials related to special topics. For example, when a fourth grade teacher mentioned that her class was studying the Southeastern states in social studies, a stack of books appeared in her classroom the next morning. The librarian also secured a video on South Carolina for her. Perhaps most important, the librarian constantly labored to procure the very best of materials. Although frustrated by the lack of elementary-level books on sports, crafts, and technical subjects,

she did manage to locate excellent publications on an amazing variety of topics.

Monte Sano's language arts program also got a boost from its learning labs. Two of the three labs in which students participated related to language arts: reading and writing. The first was conducted by the classroom teacher, often reading "big books" while students followed in their identical "little books." A teaching assistant instructed the writing lab with "intensive work on skills," in her words. Students especially were encouraged to "get away from juvenile sentences, expand vocabulary, . . . [and learn] varied uses of language" as they wrote descriptive, narrative, expository, and persuasive essays. A renowned "Red Notebook" housed in the writing lab classroom, with identical copies in all regular classrooms, contained articles on topics such as correlating comprehension and writing, ideas for bulletin boards, strategies for teaching poetry, and activities for creative writing. A teacher relatively new to Monte Sano testified to the effectiveness of such strategies. "Kids here love to be imaginative . . . all because of intense training in the writing area. [They] have to write all the time."

Monte Sano, thus, promoted language arts in many diverse ways. In stressing achievement in this key area, it simultaneously promoted achievement in other content areas. It also appeared to contribute to students' good feelings about themselves. Since reading and writing usually are considered the

most important elementary-level skills and since they often concern significant social, spiritual, and emotional issues, students seemed to exude self-respect and high regard for their accomplishments.

h. Learning labs. Monte Sano's provision of labs also promoted high academic expectations. Like other elementary schools, Monte Sano offered students weekly physical education and music classes. Unlike other schools, however, these were supplemented with three labs held every eight school days: writing, reading, and computer. The first two were discussed in section IV.B.3.g. above. Computer lab consisted of software packages that reinforced concepts and material previously learned in class. Thus, Monte Sano students received extra instruction in key skill and content areas.

Beyond this heightened academic emphasis, the labs fostered a time-consciousness among teachers and students. Both were very much aware of their schedules; since time was at a premium, every moment counted. Thus, the labs boosted Monte Sano's work-orientation.

The principal maintained that the labs also promoted students' enthusiasm for learning. Since students were "not stuck in one classroom with four walls day in and day out," they would find the curriculum appealing, in her opinion. Indeed, few Monte Sano classes could be characterized as languid or tedious. Both teachers and students appeared to be refreshed by the variation in scheduling.

i. School policies. High academic expectations also were fostered through school policies. First, promotion and grading standards were rigorous. For example, first graders promoted at Monte Sano were required to complete one more reading book and know more complex math facts than at other neighboring elementary schools. Transfer students customarily received lower grades at Monte Sano than at their previous schools.

Second, Monte Sano limited its tracking in an attempt to promote generally high academic expectations. Several years ago the school had tracked entire classes, and results on the state achievement tests were high. However, the principal questioned, "Is this fair to students, and it is fair to teachers?" She worried that tracking over a prolonged time would result in stigmatized students and burned-out teachers. Implicit in such concerns was a recognition of the importance of high self-esteem and its promotion of both good feelings and achievement.

Tracking for Chapter I classes, grades two through five, occurred during the commonly scheduled periods of reading and math at each grade level. Students from any of the three classes who qualified for Chapter I assistance proceeded in a group to the appropriate classroom for that period. In addition, first grade classrooms had within class tracking for reading; fourth and fifth grade classes tracked across grade levels for reading. A number of students who were more than one year ahead or behind grade level in reading also were sent to other classes.

The net effect, therefore, was heterogeneous classes for most of the school day, the only exceptions being reading and math classes. Even the lowest students had models of high-performing students. Teachers' expectations generally could not vary widely from class to class or from period to period.

A third policy decision designed to insure high academic expectations was Monte Sano's rejection of whole language as a major curricular approach. The principal, who was a reading specialist, felt that, while "whole language is good in its place," there existed no proof that it could properly teach each of the content areas. She and several teachers who attended a county-sponsored workshop on whole language also were repelled by its de-emphasis on writing mechanics. "Well, we're not going to lower our standards," she was reputed to have told the teachers upon seeing some horrendous examples of students' "whole language" essays. The teacher reporting this scenario added, "I was not surprised that's what she would say. . . . That was great."

Other teachers concurred with this stance. Two teachers who transferred to Monte Sano from other county schools were motivated to do so primarily by its retention of phonics and word attack reading strategies. Although whole language lessons abounded at Monte Sano, these teachers were adamant in pointing out, "But there's structure."

Fourth, Monte Sano also had a firm policy regarding parental involvement. Teachers sent home weekly or bi-weekly progress

reports with samples of students' work. Parents were expected to sign a sheet indicating that they had reviewed their child's performance. Teachers at all levels also required homework, often over the weekend. Parental assistance was expected in the early grades and with Chapter I students. In fact, both Chapter I teachers frequently sent parents letters and notes concerning classwork and upcoming tests. The Chapter I math teacher even gave "A+ Parental Participation Awards," and both teachers welcomed parents' feedback, including occasional phone calls to their homes. As with the aforementioned policies relating to requirements, tracking, and whole language, those concerning parental involvement also promoted high academic expectations.

j. Assistance for low-level students. By their very nature, Chapter I classes are designed to assist low-level students and are Federally-funded for this reason. Monte Sano, however, appeared to take extra steps to assure that these students would be well served. Classes were kept small with a maximum of ten. Each class also had a teacher's assistant, further reducing the adult-student ratio. As the Chapter I math teacher explained, "What we do that's valuable is one-on-one instruction. . . . We're able to work in small groups on their level, . . . [thus fostering] individual help and praise."

Significantly, Chapter I students at Monte Sano did not miss regular classroom instruction. The principal stressed, "Pull-out programs don't work." Rather, they learned the regular math or reading curriculum, albeit at a slower pace, during the scheduled

time for that content area. Students' performances were closely monitored with the teachers and principal meeting frequently to determine what students might be moved to regular classrooms and which additional students needed assistance. No single test score was used as a criterion; multiple measures, including teacher/principal judgment, were weighed. Indeed, a high percentage of Chapter I students, especially in the lower grades, were able to rejoin their classes.

Monte Sano similarly emphasized its special education program. Students who were consistently low in one or more academic areas and/or exhibited behavioral problems were considered by the school's Student Support Team. The team, consisting of the school principal, psychologist, special education teacher, and classroom teachers considered all the data at their disposal, often with the assistance of the student's parents, in selecting a classroom "intervention" or proceeding with tests for possible special education placement. Other painstakingly deliberate meetings would follow before such a placement actually took place. Occasionally, the placement would be a self-contained special education classroom at a neighboring school. Placements remaining at Monte Sano received tailor-made instruction from the school's resident special education teacher. Working closely with parents whenever possible, he attempted to provide an academic-emotional environment that would give students "that extra push." In the year and a half that he had been at Monte Sano, several students, in fact, had progressed out

of the program, testifying both to his efforts and the deliberations of the various teams and committees.

In addition to effective Chapter I and special education programs, Monte Sano provided an after-school program for low-performing students. Under the auspices of the local YMCA, this program served a dual purpose according to the principal: day care and tutoring. Students who lagged a year or more academically and/or had failed a criterion reference test were placed in the program. Regular classroom teachers, using regular curricular materials, drilled them on basic skills. Student enthusiasm for such efforts was high--they even renamed the program "Y Winners" from "Prime Time." The Monte Sano community also responded enthusiastically. At a PTA meeting over 500 people warmly applauded as program participants were presented with books and certificates. In yet another way Monte Sano students were being encouraged to aspire to high academic standards.

k. Recognizing limitations. It should be noted, however, that efforts were made at Monte Sano not to push students beyond their capabilities. At a special education staffing, the principal observed, "Pretty soon you just destroy the self-concept if you're always on him asking him to do something he just can't do." She advised teachers instead to "be reasonable so he can be successful. If he does more, that's great." The Chapter I reading teacher also was realistic. While both she and the Chapter I math teacher made tremendous efforts to bring these

students up to grade level, she acknowledged that "they're slow children; we're not performing miracles."

1. Honesty with students. Closely allied to recognizing students' limitations was the seemingly universal attempt of Monte Sano's faculty to be open and honest with students about their achievement. Obviously, students would not be able to aspire to high academic standards if they were not aware of their actual standing. According to the principal, there was "no false recognition. If children do something bad, we tell them. [They are] recognized for what they do well."

Evidence of such honesty abounded. On a tour of the school, the principal introduced the researcher to Chapter I classes by loudly declaring: "These students are behind one grade level." The Chapter I reading teacher was equally frank. She reminded a group of third grade students that they must pass "Level I" to be promoted. "Are you aware of that?" she queried. When students assured her that they were, she added, "We have a big task in front of us. So we have to work hard. Continue to do your homework. Work real hard." Classroom teachers were similarly matter-of-fact regarding students' achievement. When a few first grade girls tried to leave their low-level group for a higher group, the teacher waved them back saying, "You're not in that group."

Such honest assessment was never delivered in a patronizing or belittling way. In fact, with the exception of the itinerant teacher referred to in section IV.B.2.g. above, the faculty

seemed to have no negative dispositions toward students. There was a total absence of back-biting about students in the teachers' lounge. Even when faculty might have made a sarcastic comment, as when the principal and a classroom teacher were asked whether a troublesome student was "verbal" at a special education staffing, they only laughed and responded, "Yes, verbal." Thus, faculty's matter-of-fact openness with students concerning their achievement appeared to reflect their own level-headedness about students in general.

m. General philosophy. Implicit in teachers' level-headedness concerning students was the assumption that they could, indeed, succeed. This assumption was so widely and fervently believed that it resembled a school philosophy. The principal explained: "We were so naive that no one told us that children from high [free] lunch, single parent homes couldn't succeed. So we made no excuse for not succeeding. . . . We cut that out." Teachers occasionally recalled an expression coined by a beloved former assistant principal: "We get blood out of turnips."

Thus, teacher expectations were high. As a first grade teacher elaborated: "Our philosophy is to take a child as far as they [sic] can go without making them frustrated." In practical terms this often meant pushing students beyond what they might have been content to do. The school handyman referred to this as "the whip." Faculty expressed it differently, such as "us[ing] a lot of motivation," insisting students "take responsibility," and

"fussing" at students. With only one or two exceptions, the faculty demanded high quality work and rewarded students when they so performed.

A third grade teacher explained how this philosophy was applied to a recent writing assignment. She had been frustrated that most students hadn't expanded on their ideas and exhibited a limited vocabulary. To several students she asked, "What happened?" to foster elaboration. Other students were directed to use the glossary in the back of their texts, incorporating as many words as possible. She also read aloud several essays, asking the class to suggest improvements.

The teacher previously had told students that Alex Haley rewrote Roots fifty times over a period of eight years to impress upon them that "it doesn't come easy." At times she even had refused to accept students' papers, saying, "If it's not done right, we do it over." "Fun things" were reserved for extra time; "First we've got to learn," she insisted.

Yet students in this class, like nearly all others, did not balk at Monte Sano's high expectations. Resentments, if they occurred, were subjugated to a general seriousness and intensity of purpose. In fact, the only classes in which students were visibly recalcitrant were those in which teachers were confusing them and/or proceeding very slowly. Thus, students appeared to accept the prevailing philosophy, as phrased by the third grade teacher: "If you don't expect the best, you don't get the best."

n. Summary. Many of Monte Sano's means of promoting high academic standards, and, thus, high self-esteem and achievement, were anticipated in the literature. Positive teacher-student interactions were cited by several experts. Kirkland-Holmes and Federlein (1990) observed that students' self-concept "should be fostered through frequent compliments, praise, [and] display of work . . . ; all students' work should be displayed" (p. 3). Moreland Elementary School District (Moreland Recognition Program, 1984) delineated 46 ways in which students' achievement and behavior could be positively recognized. While Stevenson (1992) supported such praise and recognition, he cautioned that they must accompany genuine accomplishments.

Monte Sano's attempts at modeling found similar research support. Experts such as Powell (1989) cited the importance of models, especially for at-risk minority students. Canfield (1990) noted:

> To raise the self-esteem of students, you must start with the school staff. The main way students learn is through modeling and imitation. If teachers have low self-esteem, they are likely to pass it on to their students (p. 48).

Comer (1990), who has achieved international renown for dramatic improvements in New Haven, Connecticut, schools after implementation of his "ecological" (p. 23) model, perhaps summarized this genre of research; his model's success, he said, resulted from "a structure operating on a daily basis in the school that influenced the climate of relationships" (p. 22).

Monte Sano's administrative policies similarly were anticipated in the literature. Cooper (1990) stressed that "teachers and other staff [must be involved] in ongoing examination and revision of decisions and in collegial problem solving regarding effective implementation of instruction within and across classrooms" (p. 177). Herman (1990) recommended that such examination and revision be based on results of frequent summative testing programs. He explained:

> Tests--when they match classroom instruction--can provide fair and equitable measures of student progress, measures which focus on learning accomplishments rather than background characteristics. . . . Tests--when they are well conceived, validly constructed, sensibly analyzed and appropriately used--can provide valuable insights into how and what individuals, classrooms, schools, and systems of students are learning. These insights can help guide teaching, administrating and policy making with our educational institutions (Baker and Herman, 1985, cited in Herman, p. 169).

The success of testing programs and subsequent staff efforts to revamp their instructional approaches, however, have appeared contingent on a general philosophy of student success (Sizemore, 1990). For example, in the Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) Public School System, "school board members and administrators . . . know that nothing improves the chances more for at-risk students than the elevation of their achievement. Success gives these

youngsters improved self-esteem, which generates confidence and a sense of belonging" (Sizemore, p. 45).

In regard to tracking, research also has supported Monte Sano's practices. McPartland and Slavin (no date, cited in O'Neil, 1991) found tracking in "subjects in which differences in students' prior preparation are clear detriments to whole-class instruction" (p. 2) to be a viable means of increasing achievement of at-risk students. While avoiding the psychological drawbacks of wholesale tracking (Hale-Benson, 1990; Visions of a Better Way, 1989), such partial tracking "reap[s] the potential educational benefits of reducing student heterogeneity in a particular skill" (Slavin, 1988, p. 69). At the elementary level, regrouping across grades, especially in reading and mathematics, has been associated with higher achievement (Slavin, 1988; Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik, 1992/1993).

Monte Sano's language arts policies similarly were anticipated by research. Although whole language, particularly as an appropriate instructional strategy for beginning reading, has been both attacked and defended, "very little evidence supports any of the new 'whole language' approaches" (Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik, 1992/1993, p. 15). A "big emphasis on reading" (Slavin & Madden, 1989, p. 6), however, has been identified as crucial to the success of at-risk students, particularly in the early elementary grades. Haycock (1990) and

Cooper (1990) also alluded to the importance of the language arts program in citing the necessity of books and other materials.

Monte Sano's approaches toward low-performing students also were highlighted in research studies. Cooper (1990) stressed that effective schools "assign some of the best teachers, allocate a disproportionate amount of resources, and provide small class sizes" (p. 178) for at-risk students. Slavin, in an interview with Brandt (1988), cited the powerful effects of an "extended day program" (p. 240) for such students.

Several other Monte Sano policies had research support. Willis (1991) linked parental involvement to learning. Sizemore (1990) elaborated that teachers "must educate the parents about [educational] activities, especially when assigned as homework so that parents can reinforce school plans if possible" (p. 49). Several authorities (Beane, 1991; Hale, 1991; Sizemore, 1990) also related a multicultural curriculum to self-esteem and achievement. "Minority history, especially Black history" (Sizemore, 1990, p. 48) was viewed as a means of enabling minority students to feel that their heritage is valued in the school's curriculum.

In summary, nearly all of Monte Sano's means of promoting high academic standards were anticipated in the research. Significantly, these policies and practices appeared to promote both high self-esteem and high achievement, suggesting once again that self-esteem and achievement are inexorably interrelated.

4. The Personal Touch

One could not be in Monte Sano Elementary School long without noticing the caring, almost tender, relationship between students and staff. Intertwined with the aforementioned practices of direct teaching, discipline, and high academic expectations, it, too, contributed to students' high self-esteem and achievement.

a. Endearments and hugs. As highlighted in section IV.B.2.d. above, staff members frequently used affectionate terms for students, such as "darlin'" and "honey." Hugs also were pronounced, seemingly pro forma. For example, a first grader hugged the teaching assistant as he walked to get a new puzzle. A boy leaving his physical education class similarly paused to hug the teacher. Students attending a PTA meeting with their parents or guardians hugged the principal, teachers, and assistants both before and after the business portion.

Staff members also lightly touched students or wrapped their arms around students' shoulders. For example, when a girl interrupted a third grade classroom to request some glue for her teacher, the third grade teacher directed her to it and softly caressed her back as she turned to leave. A fifth grade teacher confronted with two boys who were not writing in their morning journals put her arms around their shoulders as she spoke to them in hushed tones. The principal lightly touched students' heads or arms as she bid them a warm good-bye at the school's front door on their way to field trips.

Indeed, hugs were so prominent at Monte Sano that the school secretary cited them as a major reason for the students' academic success. "If you see a child going down the hall who's a little droopy, you reach out and bring him up," she explained. The Chapter I math teaching assistant concurred: "A little hug in the morning to a second grader make them [sic] feel good all day and even the rest of the week." Interestingly, hugging students also appeared to reinforce staff members. As the secretary stated: "Kids, when they see the teachers, Mrs. Sutton, anyone, they'll run up and hug us. . . . They must enjoy us."

b. Teacher-student happiness. A general sense of happiness pervaded many teacher-student interactions at Monte Sano. Like endearments and hugs, this helped to transform the impersonal rigidity of Monte Sano's educational program into a more personal, pleasant process.

In many cases the happy ambience resulted from personal remarks or actions made by staff. A first grade teacher exulted, "Yea!" when a student's tooth came out and then brought him an envelope. Another first grade teacher, seeing students' fascination with a classmate's haircut in which only hair in the shape of a "T" remained on the back side of the boy's head, remarked that it was "beautiful." She advised all students to look at it, so that there would be no further need to discuss it. The other first grade teacher encouraged students to laugh and giggle at one another's original stories, most of which were

quite silly, but noted, "We never laugh at each other's mistakes."

Other examples of such staff-student happiness abounded. A second grade student whispered something to her teacher assistant while marching in line through the hallways. Both she and the assistant smiled at one another before the assistant raised her finger to her mouth indicating silence. The Chapter I reading teacher remarked to third graders upon introducing a new book, "When we get to that [story], I get to read it aloud because that's a favorite of mine." A fourth grade teacher occasionally joined her students in music class, clapping out rhythm and dancing with them. In her closing public address announcements one day, the principal warned, "It's cold out. Put on jackets. Zip them up. When you leave this warm building, your body's going to have a big shock, so do bundle up."

Many times the happy atmosphere resulted from teacher-student bantering. For example, a third grade teacher who sprayed her multi-colored overhead projector glass, creating a melange of colors and shapes, told students, "That's your art; you all have to try to understand it," as she reached for a paper towel. A fifth grade teacher reading a story about Martin Luther King's accident-prone childhood remarked with a laugh, "He sure is having a hard time with his head!"

Occasionally, this light-hearted joking referred to students or their comments. A kindergarten teacher, after hearing about a lizard which was washed down a drain during "sharing time,"

exclaimed, "Yikes, [it] might have thought it was at Six Flags or something on a ride!" A fourth grade teacher introducing the vocabulary word "clutter" asked with a laugh, "How many of you know the meaning of 'clutter' from your own room?"

Staff members also could be self-effacing. The librarian told some fourth graders, "I watched the Super Bowl, but my team didn't win." The music teacher remarked as she began swaying to a new beat, "Oh, I have a little rhythm!" Even the principal was able to laugh at herself after twice incorrectly introducing the Drug Awareness Program police officer at a PTA meeting. As both students and adults chuckled at her errors, she smilingly retorted, "Now don't you laugh at Mrs. Sutton. She's had a long day. I'm going to remember those little laughs."

Students occasionally even were able to tease the staff. A student told the Chapter I math teacher that she had written a poem about a monster at the bottom of her page. However, only a blank page greeted the teacher when she came to the student's side to read it. "If you wrote a poem, you must have written in invisible ink because there's no poem there," she responded. Students in the cafeteria told the principal she had lipstick on her perfectly clean chin. They smiled as she repeatedly rubbed it and asked them, "Are you sure?" The principal privately confided to the researcher that, though she once had feared that being personal would interfere with her role as disciplinarian, she instead found it "a help."

c. Celebrations. As mentioned in sections IV.B.2. and IV.B.3. above, celebrations reinforced Monte Sano students' good behavior and academic attainments. At the same time, of course, they also helped personalize the school's procedures and expectations.

Perhaps the school's most important celebration was the monthly birthday party. All students and faculty with birthdays occurring during the given month (with summer birth celebrations recognized at spring or fall parties) were feted at a special party in their honor. Held beneath a gaily-painted "Happy Birthday Balloon Bandwagon" at one end of the cafeteria, with balloons donated by St. Joseph's Hospital and shimmering snowflakes bobbing from the ceiling and a table lavishly decorated with party paper and a special centerpiece, honored students and faculty ate together. While they lunched, the principal snapped their pictures, commenting on their "pretty smile[s]" or inquiring about their own parties. The catered birthday cake then was cut, with the principal personally serving each person. As a conclusion students selected individual gifts from a "treasure chest" purchased by the PTA.

d. Handling student problems. Another important way of personalizing the program at Monte Sano was attending to students' individual dilemmas. A perennial student problem is the arrival of a new sibling. As the principal made her rounds one morning, a little boy whispered to her that he hadn't cried that morning before coming to school. She smiled warmly and

praised him, noting privately that he had been reluctant to attend school for several months for fear that his mother and new baby brother would be doing special things together in his absence. A first grade teaching assistant similarly comforted a little girl about her new baby brother. "He's going to be special because he has a big sister." When the student didn't comprehend who would be the "big sister," the assistant patiently explained and added, "I'm happy for you."

Staff also attended to students' more traumatic family and home problems. The physical education teacher was approached by a girl who claimed that her father was "beating on them all." Another girl showed the principal a scar and asked if she was being abused. While the principal brushed off this incident, telling the girl she "was dressed too pretty and [her] momma just went too far in discipline," she did respond to other students' concerns. For example, a consistently filthy, shabbily dressed boy was given clothes and cleaned up by the principal, who then told his grandmother that "[she's] just got to get him some things." The grandmother later wrote the principal a thank you note and attended a PTA meeting. Ironically, the grandmother's car ran out of gas following the meeting, and the principal ended up driving her home.

Since the school was without a counselor, staff members were compelled to handle such problems. A fourth grade teacher explained that she often stayed in the classroom for the first five minutes of lunchtime to address individual issues. Many

students went directly to the principal. The special education teacher noted, "She's not hard to talk to. She's understanding, especially with the kids." The physical education teacher concurred. "[Mrs. Sutton] has always had a good, positive outlook on the kids. . . . I think it's fantastic that she has an open door for the kids to come in with their problems."

Academic problems, of course, also received staff attention. When a kindergarten teacher initiated reading practice, a little girl raised her hand to tell the teacher that she "[couldn't] read a book." After the teacher assured her that they were there to learn to read, the student asked, "Will you help me read?" The teacher responded, "Yes, I'll help you. I promise I will." Later, when it was the student's turn to read, the teacher announced, "Everyone listen, I told Jennifer I would help her," as she squatted next to Jennifer's seat. After the student finished, the teacher remarked, "You did a good job on that. Keep up the good work." The student still wondered, however, whether she had performed acceptably. "You did a super job!" the teacher reassured her.

More routine matters also received teachers' attention. A first grade teacher signaled her assistant when a child consistently squinted while reading aloud. A third grade teacher went to elaborate lengths to provide a student with homework when she learned at lunchtime that the student would not be returning to class. The Chapter I math teacher made plans to "sit right with [students]" in her own classroom during the all-important

'spring tests. The writing lab teaching assistant provided extra assistance to special education and low-performing students as they worked on their essays.

e. Friendliness toward Black males. In addition to attending to individual student needs, there was some evidence of special friendliness toward Black males. This friendliness was not so overt as to constitute favoritism, and several teachers did not appear to exhibit it at all. Among those who did, however, the friendliness meant that Black male low achievers and/or behavior problems, who normally might languish in classroom corners or hallways, instead were monitored and incorporated; Black male high achievers were recognized for their accomplishments and given leadership roles on occasion; Black males of all types were included in the friendly teacher-student interactions and celebrations discussed in sections IV.B.4.b. and IV.B.4.c. above.

Teachers themselves were unaware that there was anything exceptional about their treatment of Black males. A third grade teacher explained her approach as "get[ting] to know your people" and doing whatever they needed. A kindergarten teacher echoed, "I just try to deal with problems that any of the children are having." Teachers also denied that the relatively high ratio of Black faculty at Monte Sano had any impact. According to a Black first grade teacher, treatment of students was "not a race thing." A Black fifth grade teacher concurred, noting that teachers' "dedicat[ion]," rather than race, was responsible for

Monte Sano's success. Indeed, Monte Sano teachers may not have extended themselves to Black males as much as they treated Black males like other students. Nevertheless, even this would have represented a marked contrast to prevailing norms (Bennett & Harris, 1982, cited in Hale-Benson, 1989; Irvine, 1990).

The principal did realize that Black male students required special treatment. While white males occasionally would be rude and defiant, Black males often would be hostile, in her opinion. "They're treated differently in the family from birth; society does the same thing," she explained. As a result, the principal took definite steps. She informally counseled teachers who might have problems with Black males. For example, many teachers resented their looking down during reprimands. She would advise: "You don't yell at them and say, 'Look me in the eye.'" Rather, she recommended that the teacher gently take the boy's face in her hands and say, "I certainly would appreciate it if you'd look at me." The principal also allowed Black males to "explain everything they need to explain [because] they don't perceive things." She even insisted that Black males open doors for her as a sign of "respect." The principal's actions may well have provided a model and promoted teachers' friendliness toward Black males, despite teachers' apparent oblivion of the matter.

f. Summary. Staff members not only provided a personal touch but articulated its importance. A kindergarten teacher explained that students can do well in school regardless of their home backgrounds; "it all depends on the child and [the]

connection with the teacher." The school secretary agreed. "You have to have the good rapport with each student," she declared.

These staff members were stating in their own words what a number of researchers have found--the ability of schools to create their own "social identities" (McCarthy, 1990, p. 8). McCarthy explained:

> It is schooling, via its instrumental (rules and bureaucratic organization) and expressive (rituals, etc.) orders, that generates and regenerates representatives of the social world. . . . A normative value system is elaborated in which students and teachers can affirm and locate themselves in relation to each other and to social actors outside the school (pp. 7-8).

Berry (1989) found this especially true of young Black children--that they would "take their cues" (p. 292) from the school's social system. Thus, while some experts (e.g., Akin, 1990; Beane, 1991) have fretted that raising the self-esteem of at-risk children is problematical at best, given the negative influences of their home environments, Monte Sano would suggest the opposite. Its rich employment of "cues" (Berry, 1989, p. 292) and "rituals" (McCarthy, 1990, p. 7) to create a warm ambience appeared to contribute greatly to students' self-esteem.

For most staff members, providing a personal touch seemed as natural as direct teaching, disciplining students, and holding high academic expectations. In fact, the four practices appeared to coalesce, yielding a customary Monte Sano way of educating

students. As the special education teacher stated, "The teachers here are more organized and more caring [than at typical schools]. They know how far to push the students. This group of teachers has been together for a long time." Renowned educational expert Coleman (1990) also emphasized the importance of "these less tangible organizational elements" (p. 313), in comparison with things such as physical resources, teacher qualifications, and high per pupil expenditures, all of which have practically no bearing on student achievement in economically developed societies such as the United States.

5. Teaching Values

While the practices highlighted in the preceding four sections appeared to comprise the lion's share of Monte Sano's self-esteem program, both in terms of intensity and magnitude, communication of values also seemed significant. Values that enhanced students' self-esteem were interwoven with academic programs, teaching methods, discipline policies, and personal recognition practices. The most prominent of these values are discussed below.

a. School pride. Yearbooks connote warm memories and extraordinary events and usually enhance an institution's image. Monte Sano went to great efforts to publish a yearbook, something rarely done at the elementary level. T-shirts featuring a school's name and/or mascot similarly connote vitality and loyalty. Again, Monte Sano went one step further--its new T-shirts featured a color rendition of the school by a local

artist. Thus, in very visible ways the school promoted students' pride in it.

Less noticeable, but nevertheless powerful, means of fostering school pride were evident as well. The principal often included a "here at Monte Sano" observation in the morning public address announcements. Teachers also emphasized the uniqueness of the school, as when a first grade teacher preparing students for a field trip asked, "What are some things you want to do at Colonial Bakery to show what a wonderful school Monte Sano is?" Even a local YMCA official became a school booster at a PTA meeting. She declared, "You can be so proud of Mrs. Sutton, your staff, and your school. It's one of the best I've seen."

Such remarks appeared to reflect staff members' genuine feelings about Monte Sano. The researcher frequently was met with greetings such as the one made by a second grade teaching assistant: "I hope you love it here as much as we do; it's a very special place." A comparatively new teacher remarked on a chance meeting with an old friend in the grocery store. The friend, referring to Monte Sano's local reputation, wanted to know, "Is [it] really <u>that</u> good?" The teacher confided, "You try to be humble, but . . . It's a great school!" When asked her perception of Monte Sano, the school secretary responded simply: "I can sum it up. I love it!"

Such sentiments, of course, must have been perceived by students. Their general cheerfulness, courtesy, and cooperation attested to a deep-felt commitment. A third grade boy declared

when asked to use "third" in a sentence, "I love the third grade!"

b. Patriotism. Monte Sano also promoted students' loyalty to their country. Classes sang and recited the National Anthem and Pledge of Allegiance in unison; those still in the hallways stopped and stood silently for the duration. Events of national importance, such as Inauguration Day, were featured in the morning announcements as well as class activities. Even the PTA meeting included glowing references to America's heritage in its "Inspirational." The facts that the majority of the founding fathers being extolled were slave-owners and the Constitution being paid such great tribute legalized slavery were never alluded to by the Black spokesperson or anyone in the primarily Black audience. In a word Monte Sano made being an American something highly esteemed.

c. Orderliness. One of Monte Sano's most prominent characteristics was the sense of orderliness it instilled in students and staff. College interns occasionally found this orderliness restrictive, even stifling, and a teacher acknowledged that "this school is more structured than other schools." However, students appeared to flourish under its influence. Unlike adults, they had recess and physical education in which to release physical energy. And, unlike adults, many students hailed from disorderly or even chaotic homes, thus intuitively recognizing the benefits of order. Monte Sano's orderliness, therefore, enhanced most students' self-esteem.

Daily schedules, developed by the principal and posted on each classroom door, constituted a major means of promoting order. The existence of labs and cross-grade Chapter I tracking in reading and math mitigated against substantial deviations from them. In addition, the desire of most teachers to have their classes visit the library once per week to check out books and view films (due to Monte Sano's antiquated layout, projectors could not be carted to classrooms) reinforced a regimented school schedule.

Order also was promoted as students traveled to labs, the library, physical education, music, recess, bathrooms, water fountains, and the cafeteria. As mentioned in section IV.B.2.e. above, students were expected to walk single file and quietly. When a few third graders on their way outside skipped some steps, their teaching assistant, who had been watching from above, bellowed, "Stop right there! . . . I didn't tell you to skip stairs!" She then rushed down to redirect violators' walking. A second grade assistant who led boys to the bathroom declared as they filed in, "No talking." A few moments later she called into the bathroom, "I don't want any talking whatsoever in that bathroom" and reminded them to wash their hands. A fifth grade teacher paused at a drinking fountain en route to her classroom so that each student might get some water. As they one by one left and rejoined the line of students, she commanded: "Orderly!"

Cafeteria routines similarly stressed orderliness. After procuring lunches, students walked to a table assigned to them and silently stood next to their seats until their entire class arrived. At that time the class sat down in unison with their teaching assistant at the table's head. She insisted that students eat quietly and mannerly before engaging in subdued conversations. At the meal's conclusion, before students stood in unison to form a line for dumping their trays, one student collected forks in a plastic container. Afterwards another student carefully cleaned the table and seats with a damp rag. Students' orderly lunches, thus, promoted a physical and mental state conducive to academically productive afternoons as well as enhanced self-esteem.

Orderliness was expected of students in their classwork as well. The writing lab teaching aide stressed "formatting," which included neat handwriting, observing margins and proper indentions, as a major writing skill. Classroom teachers frequently reminded students, "We don't write on the back [of pages]." When a fifth grade student included tree stumps in a picture of the frontier, the teacher perceived them as an aberration and, while permitting them, insisted that they be labeled.

Other aspects of Monte Sano life were equally orderly. Buses were met by rotating teaching aides who conducted students quickly and quietly to class. Students carried lists compiled by their teachers to the office without the need for hall passes.

Various tasks, such as placing book store orders, passing out materials, or opening doors were assigned to students, who performed them well the vast majority of the time. The librarian taught students to hold their library books "by the backbone." When physical education was confined indoors, students returned games to the front of the room and lined up at the appropriate time without teacher reminders. Even the school's "lost and found" truly returned missing items to their rightful owners.

Of course, on occasion, students did receive rebukes for disorderly conduct. When a student entered the school late one morning, the secretary scowled as she asked, "David, why are you late?" The principal, hands on hips and a frown on her face, was equally pointed with a boy whose papers flew out of his folder into a heap. "Shouldn't those papers be organized?" she queried. Such reprimands reinforced the expectation that Monte Sano students be orderly.

d. Kindness. "Kindness" was a frequently mentioned value at Monte Sano. It included "not put[ting] down anybody," in the words of the physical education teacher, and "[avoiding] physical contact," in the words of the principal. Both occasionally presented challenges. Transferring boys frequently engaged in tackle football and had to be taught both the rationale and rules of touch or flag football. Students also engaged in name-calling and back-talking at recess from time to time. This would prompt a stern lecture during the principal's morning announcements:

> We've had a lot of unkind things being said to other people lately. . . . We have talked over and over again about the importance of kindness. . . . When you go out to recess, obey the rules and obey the adults on duty. . . . Those who cannot obey the rules will not be going outside. . . . Today, we're going to be kind to each other. I don't want a single person saying an unkind word to anyone else.

Teachers also emphasized kindness. When a kindergarten girl complained that a neighbor was "telling [her]" information, the teacher responded, "That's all right, she was just helping you; it's all right if we help each other out." After a highly competitive vocabulary game, the Chapter I reading teacher required the losing team, the girls, to congratulate the boys and the boys to wish the girls "Better luck next time." Students also spontaneously exhibited kindness, as when they helped teachers locate missing students during a fire drill.

e. Personal responsibility. Kindness and cooperation were supplemented with an emphasis on personal responsibility. For example, students in the primary grades wrote essays titled "Goals for 1993," which were exhibited in the hallway. Typical was one student's determination "to follow the rules, pay attention in class, and to be a good listener." In honor of Martin Luther King's birthday, students described their dreams with two students reading theirs over the public address system at the close of school one afternoon. A first grade teacher intoned that, like Dr. King, students could solve problems

peacefully "without fighting." The principal similarly stressed, "We can start small here at Monte Sano."

Personal responsibility included sexual responsibility. Fourth and fifth grade girls attending the maturation and hygiene presentation were moved when the principal addressed them at the meeting's conclusion:

> Growing up is a wonderful thing. . . . Relax and enjoy your age. . . . Always respect your body. Each of you is very precious. Don't let anyone put a hand on you. . . . You're wonderful people. . . . I want each of you to come back and see me when you graduate from college. That's when you can think about having a family. Think about it--you want your family to have all the wonderful things in life.

Significantly, there were no single, pregnant women employed at Monte Sano who might have communicated, merely through modeling, an opposite message.

f. Manners. The practice of common courtesies at Monte Sano also enhanced students' self-esteem. Staff customarily thanked students for thoughtfulness and attentiveness, as when a third grade teacher said, "Thanks, baby," to a boy who had retrieved a paper towel for her. They demanded the same in return. When a kindergartner yawned loudly, the teacher rebuked, "Excuse me." A boy who repeatedly burped in Chapter I math was reminded by the teacher: "What do you say, Ray?" Later, she warned in low tones, "If you do that again, you'll have to leave," as she continued working with him.

g. Beauty. In subtle ways Monte Sano also raised students' self-esteem by surrounding them with beauty. The absence of litter and graffiti and the school's general cleanliness, thanks to two hardworking custodians, created a pleasant environs. Added to that were the myriad of hallway and classroom displays and the school's occasional nooks with sofas or chairs and potted plants. The cafeteria was especially lovely with a pastoral mural on one wall, hanging plants along a wall with windows, and bud vases with plastic roses on each table. Students' personal tidiness and grooming, despite limited budgets, testified to the power of such surroundings.

h. Summary. Monte Sano's emphasis on values corroborated the study's major finding that raising students' self-esteem and achievement were inexorably interrelated. While the values highlighted above enhanced students' "good feelings" about themselves, they also promoted higher achievement; i.e., students who took pride in their school and country; were orderly and responsible; and exhibited good manners and beauty; naturally performed at high levels.

Research anticipated such a finding. Ginsburg and Hanson (1988, cited in Ginsburg & Hanson, 1990) found the "overall effect of values to be consistently larger than the effect of socioeconomic status across a range of student outcomes, including academic achievement, school discipline, and high school graduation" (p. 3). The researchers stressed, "These findings reinforce the notion that the development of character

and intellect go hand and hand" (Ginsburg & Hanson, p. 3). The importance of schools in stressing values training for minority students was cited by Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990). Neither African American churches (Spencer, in press, cited in Spencer and Markstrom-Adams) nor parents (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Spencer, 1983; both cited in Spencer & Markstrom-Adams), in general, provided such cultural training.

6. Summary of Study

In summary, the study found that self-esteem of Monte Sano Elementary School students was enhanced in a variety of ways: direct teaching methods, strict and positive disciplinary practices, high academic expectations, providing a personal touch, and teaching values. These same practices also promoted high academic achievement. High self-esteem and high achievement, therefore, appeared interdependent. Monte Sano's overriding message, thus, was a very simple one--children learned holistically. To teach a child at Monte Sano was to touch all facets of a child.

C. Theoretical Explanation of Findings

1. Significance of School Principal

A theory is needed to explain why a school serving a primarily poor, minority, single-parent school population would succeed so markedly (see sections II.B. and II.C. above). The most logical explanation appeared to be the school principal, Mrs. Bertha Sutton. In a word, she was a marvel. A tall, slender, very attractive, middle-aged woman, Mrs. Sutton was both

the thorough professional and the personable leader upon whom everyone depended. Interestingly, the principal appeared to personify the multifaceted approach that garnered success with Monte Sano students.

Mrs. Sutton's professional expertise extended to all areas of the curriculum. Furthermore, she took time to attend to details that insured success, such as reviewing all teachers' lesson plans a full week in advance, scheduling classes to allow a minimum of traveling time, and monitoring teachers' performances. One teacher enthused, "She'll get us anything" [e.g., money for field trips, materials] but also allowed, "She expects a lot out of you. . . . She's hard."

The principal also was independent-minded. In the past she had rejected county-wide staff development programs that she felt would be ineffective at Monte Sano. She repeatedly asserted the positions of her staff on the placement of special education students with school board officials. She insisted that teachers adhere to a "traditional," in her words, educational approach.

At the same time the principal's personable, caring approach was legendary. One teacher commented, "Mrs. Sutton considers these children her babies. You should see her the last day of school. She looks so sad." She was equally dedicated to her staff. Whether it was a new teacher who didn't know how to mount bulletin boards, a Chapter I teacher suddenly without an assistant due to an automobile accident, or a recently retired teacher who felt bored, their needs were attended. A teaching

assistant exalted, "Mrs. Sutton treats us like we're a valuable assistance to the program."

Parents also found a friend in the principal. Although she was very firm regarding discipline, insisting on conferences with parents or guardians before readmitting flagrantly disobedient students to school, she encouraged their involvement in the educational program. She also counseled teachers to be "positive" with parents. "These children are very precious to the parents, just as your children are to you," she intoned at a staff meeting.

One teaching assistant identified "the key to the whole thing" [i.e., Monte Sano's success] as "everyone's being all together with everything." Indeed, the unity of staff, students, parents, and community was overpowering. In her straightforward, stern, and tender way, Mrs. Sutton "guided all of this," in the assistant's words.

The power of a principal in promoting student success has been well-documented. Scott (1989) observed: "The principal, at his or her best, is the architect in the development of an effective school" (p. 247). Other researchers (Brandt, 1987; Cawelti, 1987; Haycock, 1990, Sizemore, 1990) have concurred, with Andrews (1987) stressing the principal's "critical" [importance,] . . . especially for Black and low-income students" (p. 9).

2. Alternate Theories

Acceptance of this theoretical explanation for Monte Sano's success necessitates refutation of alternative theories. One possibility might be a tradition of excellence at Monte Sano that would persist despite changes in student populations. Indeed, Monte Sano appeared to have been a high-performing school during the first half of the twentieth century when it served a primarily affluent clientele residing in Augusta's Summerville district. However, its more recent history was not so bright; Monte Sano students' standardized test scores ranked among the county's lowest before Mrs. Sutton was appointed principal.

A second alternate theory might be that the racial composition of the staff, with the principal and 40% of the teachers being Black, promoted special consideration of and interest in the primarily Black student body. In fact, modeling did appear to aid student achievement, as discussed in section IV.B.3.d. above. However, aside from the principal, staff professed to attend to Black students' needs as they did those of other students (see section IV.B.4.e above). Additionally, there was no evidence of an Afrocentric curriculum or employment of a Black learning style (Gilliland, 1988, cited in Gill, 1991). Monte Sano's employment of the direct teaching method (discussed in section IV.B.1. above) and standardized tests as the ultimate referents of student success (discussed in section IV.B.3.f. above) were very much mainstream educational approaches. Thus, while Monte Sano staff's racial composition seemed to contribute

to students' success, it did not appear sufficiently powerful to constitute the major explanation.

Third, Monte Sano's designation as a Georgia Innovative Demonstration School of Excellence, with ensuing extra funding and training, might explain students' success. Several Monte Sano teachers, in fact, did allude to the lasting benefits of the intensive training they received. The writing lab teaching assistant also praised the needs assessment that was performed as part of the process. Educational expert Slavin identified the "use of systematic programs that have clear evidence of effectiveness" (Brandt, 1988, p. 22) as an important strategy for improving urban at-risk students' achievement. Other research (Glanz, 1990) found novel educational approaches to be particularly effective in multicultural settings.

Thus, it appears logical that being a Georgia Innovative Demonstration School of Excellence contributed to Monte Sano's success. However, as with the preceding theory, it does not appear sufficient in itself as an explanation. The training occurred a full six years ago, providing ample opportunity for staff to resume former, and presumably less effective, educational approaches. In addition, one fourth of the teaching staff changed during this period. Yet, student success remained relatively constant. Another more powerful explanation for Monte Sano's continuing high performance would appear necessary.

A fourth alternative theoretical explanation might be Monte Sano's high quality staff. Many of the teachers and teaching

assistants did appear very capable. However, one third of the teachers were holdovers from the administration prior to that of Mrs. Sutton, when student achievement was low. There must have been a turnabout in their performance as well as high performances by new teachers to account for students' sudden improvement. Additionally, no teachers ever mentioned one another or the staff in its entirety as reasons for students' high achievement. Rather, many teachers as well as many teaching assistants cited the principal's leadership as the major reason for Monte Sano's success.

Lastly, community contact between Black teachers and teaching aides and students might be cited as an explanation for high achievement. This, however, assumes that both staff and students lived in the same locale, which was not the case. Even when staff and students did live near one another (in one case a first grade teacher and student lived next door to each other), little neighborhood contact occurred. The same was true when staff and students attended the same church. Like other modern American cities, Augusta seemed to be characterized by a certain degree of anomie that precluded close, personal community relations.

3. Theoretical Summary

Evidence appears to support the theory that Monte Sano's principal was the secret of its success. The resemblance of the principal and many teachers to the bulk of the student body in terms of minority ethnicity and Monte Sano's designation as a

Georgia Innovative School of Excellence contributed to students' achievement. However, the impact of these latter two factors was limited, while the principal appeared to touch every fiber of school life, day after day. All of the elements of Monte Sano's self-esteem program--direct teaching, strict and positive discipline, high academic expectations, providing a personal touch, and teaching values--were orchestrated, and often exhibited, by her. The fact that Monte Sano students were characterized by feelings of self-worth and concomitantly high achievement can be attributed primarily to a very effective principal.

V. Significance and Conclusions

A. Suggested Uses of Findings

Monte Sano strongly argues that a self-esteem program be used to promote achievement of minority at-risk elementary students. Such a program appears to significantly increase such students' motivation, their major impediment to achievement in the opinion of many experts (see section II.B. above). Additionally, Monte Sano defines the components of a self-esteem program; it appears to consist both of "help[ing students] to believe in themselves and enabl[ing] them to cope with the challenges of life in productive ways" (Reasoner, 1992, p. 30) and "setting higher standards and requiring students to work hard" (Stevenson, 1992, p. 30). Of course, specific approaches must be suited to a particular school setting, and Monte Sano's general components might be articulated in a myriad of ways. However, Monte Sano does provide a safe path out of the quagmire of current contention over self-esteem (see sections IV.C.3. and IV.C.4. above). It suggests a balanced approach that interrelates feeling good with high standards.

Monte Sano also argues for increased focus on a school's principal. Both the attributes of thorough professionalism and personable leadership appear crucial. Matching a principal's race with those of a majority of his/her students and providing a principal with funds to train teachers in specific teaching strategies also appear helpful.

Perhaps most significantly, Monte Sano argues for optimism. Elementary at-risk students can succeed. As in years gone by, the American elementary school appears to have an uncanny ability to create its own social reality.

B. Recommendations for the Future

A number of recommendations can be made based on this study. First, Monte Sano would be well-advised to maintain the five components of its self-esteem program with its current principal continuing in command. However, a few teachers might benefit from further training in direct teaching and strict, positive discipline (see sections II.B.1.f. and II.B.2.g. above). Also, the school might profit from a greater emphasis on independent, critical thinking skills, particularly in the areas of science and social studies (see section II.B.2.h. above).

Second, other elementary schools serving minority at-risk populations might be required to develop their own self-esteem programs, using the general components that Monte Sano found so successful (i.e., direct teaching; strict, positive discipline; high academic expectations; providing the personal touch, and teaching values). Teachers even might be assigned to schools based on their adherence to such a program. They also might receive a major part of their training on-site, in a school's specific program rather than in the more abstract and general approaches featured at teacher training institutions.

Third, principals might receive greater support from their school boards. It was ironic that this study, which identified

the principal as the pivotal role in an effective school, was conducted at the very time when local principals were being deprived of assistant principals by the county school system. More administrative personnel and greater authority would seem imperative if principals are to achieve their potential. Concomitantly, principals might be held responsible for students' ensuing self-esteem and achievement.

Fourth, school systems might encourage the hiring of minority principals and teachers in primarily minority schools. While race alone would appear irrelevant to students' self-esteem and achievement, it does appear helpful in combination with proven educational strategies and personal attributes. Perhaps promising minority teachers and teaching assistants might be financially assisted in their quest for administrative or teaching credentials.

Fifth, teacher training in institutions of higher education might well be altered. Discipline, providing the personal touch, and the teaching of values might be integrated with instruction in teaching strategies and lesson plans. Teaching candidates also might be required to manifest skills in these areas.

The most general recommendation might be to envision education as a holistic enterprise, both incorporating personal needs and fostering high achievement. American education has been notorious for its violent swings of the pendulum between the two poles (Ryan & Cooper, 1992). Monte Sano suggests that not

only can both occur simultaneously but that each reinforces the other. Balance would appear to be the best tack.

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